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Becoming the current client

A study of openings at Swiss railway station counters

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1 The project “Am Schalter – Au guichet – Allo sportello”

Becoming the current client is a practical problem that most of us are familiar with when entering a station and queuing in front of the counter in order to buy a ticket or request another service. Queues are formed as the number of customer exceeds the service provider's ability to serve them and customers have to wait for their turn. Often, a sense of urgency is related to the queue – when pushy customers are in a hurry, and busy service providers behind the counter orient to time issues. On the basis of video records of actual queuing behavior, *becoming the current client* is accessible as an analytical problem. This paper addresses the issue of how turns are taken in queues and how series of openings are organized at the counter. Openings at the counter are an exemplary *locus* for studying how service encounters are distinctively organized within a particular institutional setting; the very fact that they begin well before a single word is exchanged opens up questions about the boundaries of single interactions, their relation to series of interactions, as well as their embeddedness in a broader activity system. The analysis of the process of *becoming the current client* also addresses the very category of “client” and its emergent and progressive transformations, as s/he enters the station as a *possible* client, starts to queue and becomes accountable as a *waiting* client, moves forward to the front of the queue as the *next* client and finally walks from the front of the queue towards the counter as the *imminent* client – finally becoming the *current* client when arriving at the counter and engaging in the opening.¹ How are these transformations accountably achieved, oriented to and responded to by the co-participants? Which embodied actions constitute the unilateral preliminaries to the opening, and when does the opening start? What do variations in the achievement of openings tell us about the way the service is conceived and implemented? This paper deals with the organization of openings at the railway station counter as an exemplary phenomenon and highlights how, in this specific institutional setting and within the local material environment, service is conceived, provided and implemented through multimodal actions.

Through this particular analytical focus on openings of service encounters, this paper presents some preliminary results of the project “Am Schalter – Au guichet – Allo sportello” initiated by the authors in 2014 and aims at studying social interactions at the counters of the Swiss National Railways (SBB CFF FFS).² The project is based on exten-

1 In order to emphasize this communicated status of being *next*, *imminent*, *current* ... we use the term “client”. Otherwise we use the term “customer” (especially when referring to concrete persons at the counter).

2 The initiation of the project (including the extensive data collection) was supported by the URPP Language and Space (University of Zurich) and the University of Basel. Many thanks to the Basel and Zurich teams involved in data collection, data preparation, transcribing and first analyses: David Monteiro, Hanna Svensson, Nymke van Schepen, Burak Tekin (Basel), Michelle Bosshard, Christoph Hottiger, Johanna Jud (Zurich). First findings have been discussed in a number of workshops. Many thanks to Mathias Broth, Christian Heath, Leelo Keevallik, Wolfgang Kesselheim, Dirk

sive fieldwork at four major stations in Basel, Zurich, Geneva and Lugano,³ where we collected a large amount of audio- and videotaped service encounters. This first section presents the project before we engage in the study of openings based on data from these different settings.

1.1 The project

The project has chosen to focus on encounters at the railway stations in Switzerland for various reasons: these encounters are a form of institutional talk that both presents a highly standardized service and a personification of that service; they emanate from an institution that is nationally present on the Swiss territory and, at the same time, specific to the national languages and cultures. The service provided is conveyed through talk in important ways, but also implies the transfer of material objects – such as tickets and other documents, not to speak of, money – and is technologically supported. On a broader level, the service is situated within a larger environment that articulates two organizational orders – the organization of flows and queues of many customers in the station's halls and the organization of single service encounters at the counter. These aspects are core elements of the project, which aims at contributing to the study of institutional talk, and more particularly, of service encounters within a multimodal perspective on social interaction, including the consideration of bodies in space, material and technological resources, and the design of architecture.

The study of social encounters at railway station counters aims at contributing to the broader field of institutional talk (Drew & Heritage 1992). The counter is a key locus where the railway company is brought into being for its customers seeking service. Studying interactions at the counter, therefore, contributes to older and more recent research in service encounters (Aston 1988; Fox & Heinemann 2015; Lappalainen & Raevaara 2009; Merritt 1976; Mondada & Sorjonen 2016; Sorjonen & Raevaara 2014). More particularly, this everyday routine activity (for staff as well as for many customers) is organized in *action formats* and *types of sequences* that are highly repetitive, and even standardized within the company (including, for instance, openings and closings, requests and inquiries, etc.). At the same time, there is a tension between this *standardization* and important *variations*: the formatting of turns and action are adapted to situational and

vom Lehn, Angelika Linke, and Reinhold Schmitt for their comments on the preliminary oral presentations of this paper.

3 Fieldwork has been made possible thanks to an agreement with the Swiss National Railways. Many thanks to Christian Rossi, SBB CFF FFS responsible for this cooperation. Thanks to the local responsible partners in each station, in particular to Regina Schneider (Zurich), Tobias Leimbacher (Basel), Beat Möckel (Geneva), and Markus Scherrer (Lugano). Last but not least, a warmest thank to the many SBB CFF FFS employees behind the counter who accepted to be videotaped and provided fantastic insights on their work, as well as to the many customers in front of the counter who allowed us to document their interactions.

local contingencies that vary, in principle, across stations, linguistic regions and customers. This opens up the opportunity to tackle systematic variations relative to the participants' orientation to locally relevant categorization devices (Sacks 1972) and to the way in which they design their actions according to the situation and recipient (Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974). Furthermore, the Swiss national context, with different national languages and different cultural regions (German, French and Italian speaking Switzerland, not to speak of Rumantch) allows for *comparative research* in a nearly unique way: Given the standardization of the service that holds across these different regions, cultures and languages, we can expect similarities and differences not only in turn and action formatting but also in more broader and elusive cultural practices, possibly differing within different dialectal and regional areas (such as between Basel and Zurich, both part of the German speaking Switzerland), and linguistic regions (such as between Basel/Zurich in the German speaking, Geneva in the French speaking and Lugano in the Italian speaking Switzerland). In this way, the project aims also to contribute to the increasing interest in comparative research within CA (Hausendorf & Bora 2006; Sidnell 2009; Haakana/Laakso/Lindström 2009 – and Mondada & Sorjonen 2016 for service encounters).

In our project, service encounters are considered from a multimodal perspective (Deppermann 2013; Heath 1986; Heath 1992; Heath/Knoblach/Luff 2000; Goodwin 1981; Goodwin 2000; Goodwin 2002; Goodwin 2007; Mondada 2014a; Mondada 2016a; Mondada & Schmitt 2010a; Schmitt 2007a; Schmitt 2007b; Schmitt & Knöbl 2013; Streeck 2009; Streeck/Goodwin/LeBaron 2011). This has a series of consequences for how the encounter is studied. Service at the counter is not provided in a mere verbal way – as on the phone in a call center – but crucially involves a face-to-face visual contact between the participants. Moreover, within the encounter, a variety of material artifacts are bodily oriented to: participants handle tickets, documents and money over the counter. Participants are not only involved in face-to-face interactions but also turn towards screens and computers, through which a conspicuous part of the work is carried out. In this way, the counter is not only a rich locus for embodied interpersonal interaction, but also an institutional place where material transactions happen, exchanging objects (Neville et al. 2014), and a workplace in which technologies play a crucial role (Heath & Luff 2000). Moreover, the counter is a specific place to talk with one another: participants are separated by a desk, sometimes by a windowpane, which both connects and separates them, and *through which* they interact (Hazel & Mortensen 2014). The design of the counter has been subject to massive transformations these last years, including the transformation of the windowpane counters into open counters. This raises questions concerning the extent to which the organization of social interaction is affected by these diverse spatial configurations, both enabling, supporting and also constraining and hindering mutual communication. It also offers the opportunity to discuss the interplay between social interaction, and spatial and architectural details of the counter and even to develop a form of historical perspective on the material conditions for social interaction. In this sense,

the project also aims to further develop recent studies of multimodal interaction considering built and designed space (“space for interaction” – Hausendorf/Mondada/Schmitt 2012, as well as “architecture-for-interaction”: Hausendorf & Schmitt 2013; Hausendorf/Schmitt/Kesselheim 2016).

1.2 The phenomenon

This paper deals with openings at the counter. The organization of opening sequences is a classic topic in conversation analysis (Hazel & Mortensen 2014; Schegloff 1968; Schegloff 1972; Schegloff 1979; Schegloff 1986). Moving from the study of openings in telephone conversations to the study of openings in co-present face-to-face interactions (see Mondada & Schmitt 2010b) has generated a renewed interest in the first mutual glance and the establishment of a new interactional space (Mondada 2009) even before the first words of the encounter are exchanged (Duranti 1997; Kendon & Ferber 1973). This has prompted studies about the preliminaries to openings in face-to-face interactions, either in terms of “openings of openings” (Hausendorf & Schmitt 2010) or *pre-openings* and *pre-beginnings* (Mondada 2010; Mondada 2016b). Studying openings in over the counter interactions allows us to further discuss when social interaction starts, and to investigate activities that are *prior* to the *encounter* but belong to the management of the service or of the case (Hazel & Mortensen 2014). This raises questions about the relevance of practices characterizing the moment prior to the opening, in which the participants do not yet interact but actively organize their aligned entry into the interaction. This also raises issues about the emerging categorization of the co-present persons as imminent, possible but not yet co-participants, transitioning from an unfocused to a focused interaction (Mondada 2009), that is, in the present case, the relevant and changing categories of persons in the hall moving from *possible* to *next* to *imminent* and, finally, to *current* clients.

In this paper, we analyze recurrent institutional multimodal formats of counter openings. The specific focus lies within the particular attention devoted to the spatial-material configurations the openings adjust to; this paper offers a series of analyses – some of which are detailed single case analyses, others are systematic analyses of collections – of openings in different contexts, investigating the interplay between the environment and the organization of embodied practices in pre-opening as well as opening contexts. In this way, we discuss not only several organizational patterns for institutional openings of service encounters, but also how they are specifically shaping and reflexively shaped by the local spatial contingencies. This necessitates that we exploit the local specificities of the counters in Basel, Lugano, Geneva and Zurich within the next analytical sections. But before that, we provide some more specifications concerning the corpus of data.

1.3 The data

The project “Am Schalter – Au guichet – Allo sportello” has been developed on the basis of an extensive data collection, conceived and gathered in a way that preserved the same relevant features over a diversity of linguistic, cultural and material settings.

The data were collected by us and our teams between October and December 2014 at the Basel, Zurich, Geneva and Lugano main stations. Recordings were made at several counters in parallel (that is, with various agents and innumerable clients), in a continuous way over the course of 1 – 2 days in each station. In the end, we documented hundreds of short encounters. We also covered different moments during the day, corresponding to different business conditions: for instance, we documented morning and late evening moments when there is not much going on, as well as rush hours with plenty of customers waiting to get their turn and in a hurry. We also documented different types of customers: daily commuters, travelers engaging in or planning an extra-ordinary trip, as well as tourists. We also gathered data in a variety of languages beside the local ones (French, Italian and Swiss German dialects), including L2 varieties (of German, Italian and French) as well as English as lingua franca. Furthermore, we took care to cover different counter settings existing in Basel and Zurich (windowpane counters within the main hall vs. open counters within a special service counter area) and Geneva (open counters with queuing lines and open counters with computer supported queuing management systems within the same counter area).⁴

Three to four cameras were used per counter. Choices about how to record the events were made according to relevant features of the social interaction and relevant multimodal resources mobilized by the co-participants (Mondada 2012). Several complementary perspectives were adopted on the participants (roughly, on a diagonal on each side of the counter): one camera focused on the computer screen in order to make available the work of the officer, sometimes made accessible to the customer too, and a second camera was used to capture the wider environment (the main hall or the service area).

Next, the data were synchronized into a multiscope video, and a substantial amount of data has been transcribed. On the basis of preliminary analyses, the corpus appears to be quite unique, thanks to the quantity as well as the quality of recordings.

1.4 Outline

In what follows, we focus on the organization of openings of service encounters. This analytical focus constitutes an opportunity not only to revisit a classic topic in conversation analysis but also to reflect upon the specificity of our corpus. The multimodal

⁴ At Lugano main station, there was at the time of the recordings only one type of open counter, without any use of queuing managing system.

approach made possible by high quality video recordings allows us to focus analytically on the importance of local contingencies and material configurations on the organization of openings. To introduce our analyses, we discuss the variety of spatial and material configurations of the counters in the four recorded settings (§ 2). Then, we describe the openings in each of these configurations, showing both recurrent features and specific adjustments to the local design of each service hall. First, on the basis of video recordings made in Zurich, we show how openings at the windowpane counter are organized and highlight the consequences of its restricted visibility for the way customers approach the counter and for the establishment of the first mutual gaze with the officer (§ 3). Second, on the basis of data recorded in Lugano, we show that even open counters can raise similar problems when there is limited visual access between the queue and the counter (§ 4). Third, focusing on a specific configuration observed in Geneva, we show how queuing right in front of the (open) counter glues together in interesting ways the closing of the previous and the opening of the next encounter (§ 5). Fourth, on the basis of data recorded in Basel, we show the consequences of the use of a computer supported queuing management system on the organization of the pre-opening practices of both customers and officers before they actually converge at the counter (§ 6.1). Fifth, on the basis of an analogous setting in Zurich, we reflect on possible hitches and delays in the transition to the next client (§ 6.2). The analyses deal with single cases (§ 3, 4, 6.2) and with collections (§ 5, 6.1), showing the productivity of these two kinds of approaches. Globally, the aim is to reflect on the significant and relevant adjustments of the organization of openings related to issues of visibility, accessibility, accountability that are raised by different counter configurations.

2 Standardization and variation of openings: Similarities and differences between counters at different railway stations

Openings are shaped as situated and embodied responses to the practical problem of how to organize the aligned and coordinated entry of different parties into social interaction – typically an SBB officer and one or more customers. This coordinated entry relies on the progressive approach of two parties coming closer: a) it relies on the movement of one mobile party – the customer – towards the stationary other party – the officer; b) it also relies on the unilateral and mutual gaze, at more or less distance, between the two parties as the approach progresses; c) finally, it also relies on the production of greetings, as a first pair part and a second pair part, which can be initiated and responded to as the customer is, more or less, close to the counter (and in any case, before s/he reaches the counter). These resources and practices and their temporal and sequential mobilization relate in specific ways to the space of the hall as well as the place and the design of the

counter. This is why, in this section, we detail some specificities of the counters we study (§ 2.1) as a basis for some contrasts (§ 2.2) which emerged as relevant in the analyses, and which have also consequences for the way we can situate and describe the actual participants within the global activity of entering the service hall, waiting and approaching the counter (§ 2.3).

2.1 Spatial configurations of the counters at different stations

The service counters in Swiss railway stations are currently subject to changes in the architectural arrangement and “social design” of their spatial environment.⁵ These transformations of the architecture are, roughly speaking, a transition from the windowpane counter within the main hall (often said to be a classic but also antiquated solution) to a desk within an open service area (often said to be a modern and up to date solution). These two configuration (still) coexist at Zurich main station and co-existed at Basel main station when we made the recordings; customers are free to choose between these two arrangements. Both also combine with different arrangements for queuing: physical queuing near to the windowpane counter vs. computer-supported queuing systems within the open counter setting (Figures 1–4).

Figure 1

Zurich: Windowpane counter with queuing



Figure 2

Zurich: Open area with computerized system



⁵ The architectural transformations of the station is accompanied by various efforts undertaken by the SBB CFF FFS to bring customers to use online services and/or to use ticket machines at the station instead of using face-to-face services. It is part of a more general development towards the increasing use of computerized devices in the organization of services.

Figure 3

Basel: Windowpane counter with queuing

**Figure 4**

Basel: Open area with computerized system



Whenever the counter was architecturally redesigned in the last years, there seemed to be a preference for open counters without windowpane – as it is the case in Lugano (Figures 5–6).

Figure 5

Lugano: Queuing

**Figure 6**

Lugano: interacting at the open counter



Although the introduction of the open counter system (without windowpane) does not necessarily include a transition from actual queuing to a computerized management system of the queue (as can be observed in Lugano), the disappearance of the windowpane is often accompanied by a change in queuing.⁶ The physical queue in front of a line of counters has often been replaced by a queue management system within

⁶ The change in queuing systems at the station appears to be a sensitive issue often commented in the mass media. Take, for instance, the transition to a so-called “American” queuing system (as it is known from the airport) at Zurich Main Station in 2011 (<http://www.srf.ch/play/radio/espresso/audio/sbb-will-wartezeiten-vor-den-schaltern-verringern?id=5bceofc2-d72f-493c-8f99-d788e734db3f>) or the protests that emerged at Biel main station when the computerized system was temporarily abandoned – before to be finally re-installed (<http://www.bielertagblatt.ch/nachrichten/biel/sbb-gibt-nach-einsehen-beim-ticketsystem>).

a special service area (as in Zurich and Basel). The management system generates the order of waiting customers by providing tickets with numbers. The customer's number in operation is displayed on a monitor. The next number is signaled acoustically. So, customers do not queue physically but are expected to monitor their number being called and displayed on the screen. At Geneva main station, where the service area had recently been redesigned when we did our recordings, both queuing systems coexisted within the same open area (Figures 7–8).

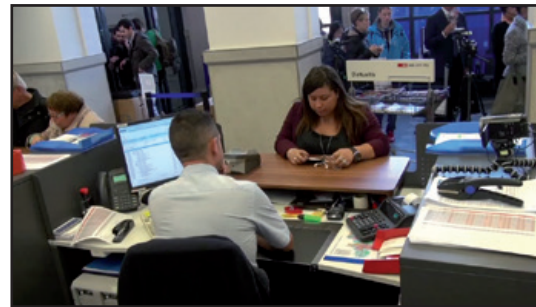
Figure 7

Geneva: open counter with physical queue



Figure 8

Geneva: open counter with computerized system



As a result, stations present different queuing systems and spatial organizations that differ not only from station to station but also between various areas within the same station. This is often the result of lengthy negotiations and reconfigurations of space/systems, which makes relevant different features that are organizationally important for how openings are achieved.

2.2 Contrasting visual-spatial features of counter design

A closer inspection of not only the place and design of the counter, but also of the space of the hall where it is located reveals further differences. In some places, physical queuing in front of windowpane counters is also supported by acoustic and optical signals (in Zurich but not in Geneva). At some places, the front of the queue is located near the counter and allows for mutual perception between (next) customers and the agent at the counter (in Geneva). By contrast, in other places, the front of the queue is at some distance from the counter, preventing the agent⁷ from seeing the next client before s/he leaves the front of the queue (windowpanes in Basel and Zurich; some open counters in Lugano). As we shall see in the analyses, the contrast is, therefore, not only related to design (open counter vs. windowpane) but also related to the ways design combines with the actual organization of queuing. The following tables synthesizes these observations.

⁷ Referring to those behind the counter we use the terms “officer” and “agent” as synonyms.

Figure 9
Counter design: Differences in queuing and architecture

		Queuing	
		Physical queuing	Computerized queuing system
Architecture	Windowpane counter	Zurich 1; Basel 1	
	Open counter	Lugano; Geneva 1	Zurich 2; Basel 2; Geneva 2

In what follows, we start by looking at physical queuing at the windowpane counter in Zurich (§ 3), go on to analyzing physical queuing at the open counter in Lugano (§ 4) and Geneva (§ 5) and finish by analyzing computerized queuing systems in Basel and Zurich (§ 6.1 and § 6.2).

2.3 Sequential, categorical, and spatial dimensions of the organization of action

Before starting the individual analyses and analyses of collections, a few general observations should be made. A constant feature that holds for all counters – whether there is a windowpane or not, a physical queue or a computerized system, absence or presence of visible access between waiting client and agent – is an *asymmetry of mobility* between the participants. The agent/officer behind the counter is a *stationary* participant physically bound to his/her position. Prior to a particular encounter, s/he is already at his/her place awaiting the next client – and remains there after the client has left the counter (awaiting the next one). By contrast, the clients coming to the front of the counter are *mobile* participants. They have to move from a prior position (i. e. at the front of the queue) to the counter and have to leave the counter when the interaction has come to an end. This asymmetry in mobility impacts the organization of opening and closing as we will show.

The mobility of the customer is important for the way s/he approaches the counter just prior the opening. In this sense, mobility is fundamental well *before* the opening: not only when the customer begins to move towards the counter, but also when the potential client enters the station, and then the service hall. Likewise, this trajectory is important when the client leaves the hall or the station. Thus, mobility defines the emergence, relevance and dissolution of the very category of ‘client’. This category is established along his/her walk into the station, related to particular activities (such as buying a train ticket, asking for information about the time schedule, renewing a frequent user card, etc.). This category is made relevant by the participants *in situ*, and dissolves for other relevant categories when the person leaves the station and engages in other everyday activities,

such as being a mother, an estimated professional, a good friend, etc. This analysis reveals the centrality of membership categorization analysis (Sacks 1972; Sacks 1992) for the tracking of the trajectory of the client. It also shows the fruitfulness of combining membership categorization analysis and mobility in interaction (Haddington/Mondada/Nevile 2013); not only ways of walking are significant and structuring (Mondada 2014b; Sorjonen & Raevaara 2014), but they are also strongly bound to categories (Mondada 2009; Mondada in press a; Mondada in press b; Schmitt 2012).

Clients' categories are multifarious and evolve as the person moves through different steps within the station. One fundamental activity is *queuing* – which is a practice that organizes the turn-by-turn accessibility to a service. Queues are a pervasive form of social organization, characterized by a 'first come, first served' logics but also the normative rule of 'one at a time'. The rules and the order of queues are not imposed from outside, but are created by the persons queuing themselves – as demonstrated very early on by classical studies of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 2002, ch. 8; Brown 2004; Livingston 1987; Francis & Hester 2004, 91ff.). The order of the queue is available at a glance, both as a global pattern and as far as the local position of the person in the queue is concerned. The persons constituting the queue constantly inspect it and its progression – establishing their normative order and a consequent set of expectations.

Thus, the queue's order has two important dimensions, a sequential and a categorical one. Queuing produces a sequential ordering, defining the turn-by-turn access to the service (Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974). Queuing also produces the visibility of categorical positions, like being the first, being the last, being the next in line, etc. (Francis & Hester 2004, 93). We will show how these two sequential and categorical dimensions operate; in particular we focus in detail on how a person progressively leaves the position of a *waiting client* (within the queue) to accede to the position of becoming the *next client* and finally of accessing the category of the *current client* being served. These categories are mostly ordered by the positions in the queue – but also by the mobile trajectories of joining and leaving the queue, and approaching the counter.

The organization of *openings* strongly relates to the issue of *becoming the current client*. This has a categorical, institutional, sequential and spatial dimension deeply related to the organization of the opening at the counter. It is the transition from *next* to *current* client that defines the opening. Thus, before one accesses the counter, there is a wider trajectory of the client. Upon entering the station, the person walking in becomes a *possible* client (since not all the persons within the station are clients, but can be people waiting for arriving travelers, people meeting there, homeless, drug dealers, etc.). The person becomes a possible *client* when positioning in a queue – that is, when becoming a *waiting client*. As s/he moves on within the queue, and arrives at its front, the client becomes the *next client*. As we shall see, this involves increasing monitoring of what is happening ahead in the queue and at the counter. This monitoring is crucial for example in situations of urgency, where the transition from the *next* to the *imminent client* might

be relevant (in which *imminent* is not yet *current*, but might relevantly characterize incipient movements towards the counter). Finally when accessing the counter and upon the opening of the opening, the client becomes the *current client* – as the current becomes the *previous*.

These client categories – with attributes such as *possible*, *waiting*, *next*, *imminent*, *current* and *previous* – are publicly accountable and emerge as such within the trajectory of a client moving through the space of the waiting hall. Differently put, these categories are made relevant by *category-bound activities* that are noticed by co-present others (also including the agent behind the counter; Sacks 1972). Mobile practices are among these category-bound activities – intended not as individual movements but as socially meaningful and normatively oriented to movements within a cohort of other – sometimes concurring and competing – clients. Other practices, such as gazing at the counter / gazing at the customer from a distance and mutual gaze, are fundamental and show again the importance of both participants engaging in them. Furthermore, greetings also contribute to the agent's recognition and further achieve her and him *as* current client. By contrast, as long as the agent does not engage in these practices – e. g. because s/he is still busy with the previous case, or s/he is engaged in a side interaction with another agent – being at the counter might still be accountably treated as *next* rather than *current* client.

The empirical analyses of the paper tackle these issues at length, showing the relevance of the temporal and sequential organization of the activity, of mobility and movement to the counter, the categorical transformations of the client, and the constraints of the architectural and spatial configurations on these courses of action.

3 Approaching the windowpane counter in Zurich

We start with examples from the Zurich main station to illustrate the transition from next to current client within a classic queuing setting. Firstly, we will characterize the setting and the ways in which the availability of the counter is signaled, showing how this detail shapes the transition from next to imminent client (§3.1). Turning to a single case study, we will then track a customer on her way to the counter, highlighting the importance of a critical focal zone of mutual perceptibility between the customer and officer, where the imminent client becomes the current client (§3.2). Finally, we will look at two examples in which the typical smooth transition from imminent to current client does not work (§3.3).

3.1 From next to imminent client

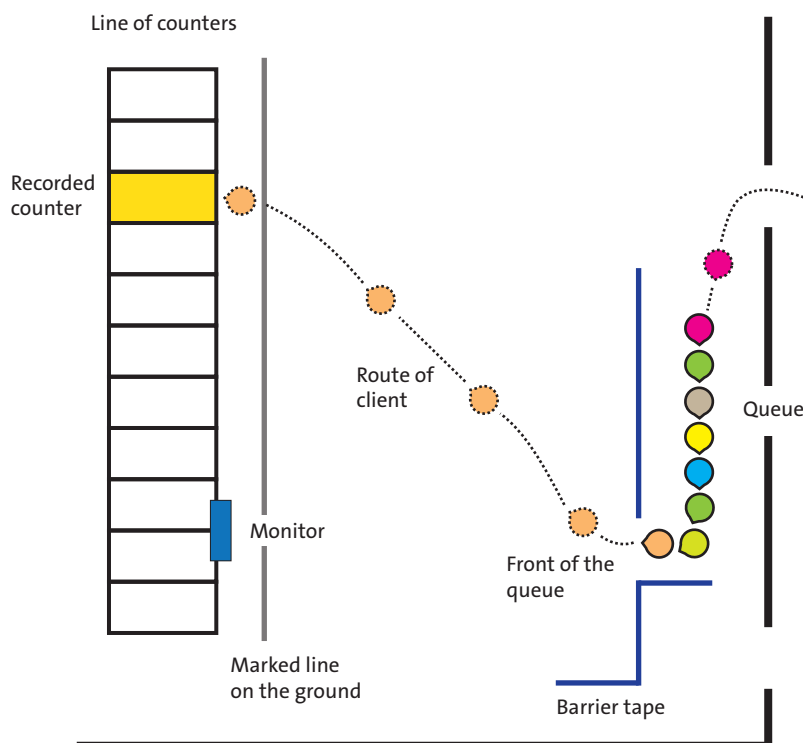
The Zurich windowpane setting is characterized by a line of counters within the counter hall: the front of the queue is quite afar from the counters we have chosen to record.

Figure 10

Zurich main station: line of counters and queuing customers

**Figure 11**

Zurich main station: map of the hall



The key elements of the setting are the front of the queue, the counters that have been recorded (number 10 and 11, which are the last ones in the background of Fig. 10) and the electronic display of vacancy on the monitor, placed above the counter vis-à-vis the front of the queue. The following figure (Figure 11) offers a map of the same setting.

Several features visible in Figures 10 and 11 systematically come into play in the transition from next to current client. The next client's move to leave the front of the queue is a one that is nothing but trivial, since it depends on the display of vacancy of the next available counter. In this setting, such a display is a technical one. There is a monitor vis-à-vis the front of the queue (see below Figures 14 and 15) and, additionally, a light signal directly above the counter signals that a counter has become available. This availability, in turn, is the product of an officer's action of pressing a button activating the signal (Figures 12 and 13).

Figures 12–13

Display of availability via technical devices

Figure 12

Agent presses the button

**Figure 13**

Green light appears above the counter



Figure 12 shows the agent pressing the button that produces an optical signal (a green light) at the newly open counter (number 10 in this example, Figure 13) and the emergence of the number of what is now a free counter on the monitor vis-à-vis the front of the queue (for example, number 7 in Figure 15 – in contrast to Figure 14 signaling that no free counter is available).

Figure 14

No available counter in this moment ("Please wait")

**Figure 15**

Number of the now available counter has appeared



These technical displays of availability do *not* depend on the officer's and customer's mutual perception of being perceived by each other. The officer cannot see the front of the queue when pressing the button, and the next client at the front of the cue cannot see the officer behind the available counter. Accordingly, there is no interaction between them at this point. That is why technical devices are necessary. They support the activity with communicative means that do not depend on face-to-face interaction, but rather on sending off a signal with the expectation that it will be monitored and received by the next client.

However, technical devices may also prove to be insufficient in this setting. The following stills show how the agent can additionally display her availability by multimodal resources, relying on face-to-face interaction when the technology seems to fail.⁸

Extract 1

(ZH_Win_Sch11_Pers3_Gespr4)⁹

Image 1.1 (24:08:07)

Looking for the next client



Image 1.2 (24:09:22)

Waving to the next client



The officer has activated the signal and is looking for the possible next customer (image 1.1); when she sees her she waves her hand (image 1.2). Thus, the multimodal resources mobilized in this case require an extensive use of the body. By leaning the upper part of her body forward and by bending her head (image 1.1), the agent is trying to see who is next – which seems to be impossible as long as she keeps sitting in an upright position on the counter chair.

To some extent, in these cases, the officer is acting “against” the architecture of the counter and the counter hall – which is nicely illustrated in an example from Basel windowpane counter in a similar setting.

⁸ We return to this case at the end of this section.

⁹ Extracts are numbered from 1 to 27; when several subsequent fragments refer to the same extract, their parts are numbered (e. g. Extract 1 / part 1.1). Screen shots referring to these extracts are numbered in the following way: first the number of the extract, then the number of the image within the extract (e. g. Extract 13: image 13.1, image 13.2, image 13.3, etc.). When several images refer to the same instant, from different camera perspectives, they are numbered with a letter (e. g. image 13.1a, image 13.1b, image 13.1c).

Figure 16

Leaning forward and looking for the next client (BSoct_WIN_Sch6_Pers1_Gespr3)

Figure 16a**Figure 16b**

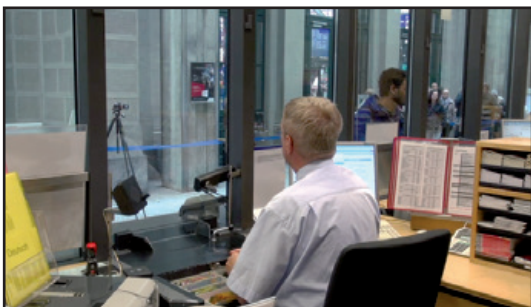
The same phenomenon of leaving the backrest of the chair and leaning forward (Figure 16a/b) can be observed at the Zurich counter. For instance, extract 2 shows the agent waiting for the customer who has already started his path from the front of the queue. Although the customer has already covered some distance (2.1b) the officer obviously cannot see him yet (images 2.1a, 2.1b, 2.1c).

Extract 2 / part 2.1

(ZH_Win_Sch10_Pers2_Gespr1)

Image 2.1a (05:46:09)

Waiting for the next client

**Image 2.1b****Image 2.1c**

It is not until the officer leans forward with the upper part of his body and head that he can see whether a next and imminent client is approaching or not (images 2.2a, 2.2b and 2.2c).

Extract 2 / part 2.2

(ZH_Win_Sch10_Pers2_Gespr1)

Image 2.2a (05:47:09)

Trying to get sight of the next client

**Image 2.2b****Image 2.2c**

The officer has to make some additional bodily efforts to direct his eyes (his visual ‘sensors’) towards the expected route of the customer. As already mentioned, the officer partly acts “against” the architecture of the counter: its spatial arrangement prevents or at least hinders the officer behind the counter from monitoring the people waiting at the front of

the queue (and particularly the *next* client) and even seeing the person who has already started out (the *imminent* client). Furthermore, waving to the next client (as illustrated in image 1.2 above) supposes mutual perception so that the officer’s gestural display of availability can be noticed. This is a clear case of face-to-face interaction with a distance between the officer (behind the counter) and the imminent client (on his way to the counter).

In our data from the windowpane counters at Zurich and Basel main stations, such bodily displays of availability nevertheless constitute rather exceptional cases. At the very early beginning of the movement operating the transition from next to imminent client, technical devices are predominantly used, rather than bodily devices. Face-to-face interaction, then, starts a bit later, when the next client has already left the front of the queue and is closely approaching the counter as the imminent client. Sooner or later s/he enters the critical zone of mutual perceptibility. In the following sub-sections, we will analyze this transition in more detail.

3.2 From imminent to current client

We now turn to a larger extract starting with the moment when the officer has pressed the button to signal his availability. It takes approximately five seconds till the imminent client is visible on our cameras.

We see the customer (circled in images 3.1, 3.2) whom we know will be heading to counter 10. When she has started to move out of the queue and has gradually come into the possible sight of the officer, the latter is still busy with other things (see image 3.2). He seems to routinely anticipate that it will take some time till the next-to-imminent client comes into *his* sight and he himself comes into *her* sight. So, there is no face-to-face interaction between them at this very moment.¹⁰ The approaching customer is still an ‘imminent client’ since she has not yet been recognized as the current client by the officer.

Our videos allow to precisely track the progression of her trajectory.

Extract 3 / part 3.1

(ZH_Win_Sch10_Pers2_Gespr14)

Image 3.1 (34:08:12)

Next client has just left the front of the queue



Image 3.2

Officer is still busy



¹⁰ Although the next client seems to be visible to the agent (see 3.2) it becomes quite clear from the videos that there is no mutual visibility at this stage due to the distance between both participants.

Extract 3 / part 3.2

Customer is approaching the counter

Image 3.3a (34:09:06)



Image 3.4a (34:09:14)



Image 3.5a (34:10:01)



Image 3.6a (34:10:06)



Officer is finishing previous work and preparing for the next client

Image 3.3b



Image 3.4b



Image 3.5b



Image 3.6b



Images 3.3a–3.6a show the customer pulling a rolling case (trolley) and turning in the direction of counter 10. Here, she exclusively occupies the open space (the “no man’s land”) between the queue she has left and the counter she is gradually approaching. She is still at some distance from the counter (a bit more than ten meters), and the agent, orienting to the time it takes to walk from the queue to the window, has not yet started to monitor who is coming next, although he has now turned with his chair towards the front of the counter (compare his position in image 3.3b with his position in image 3.6b). There is still no face-to-face interaction between the (approaching) customer and the (waiting) officer. This holds for the next moments as well. There is obviously still enough time for both participants to pay attention to other things than to each other, as shown by the following images taken a second later.

Extract 3 / part 3.3

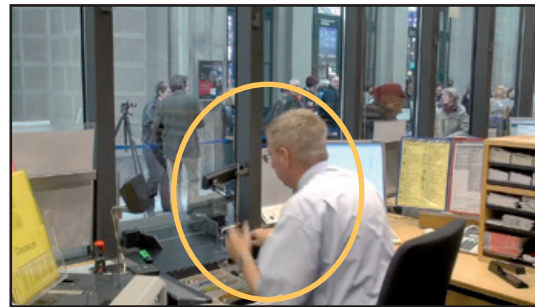
Image 3.7a (34:11:06)

Customer: Gazing into another direction



Image 3.7b

Officer: Busy with the (open) cash-box



The officer has started to manipulate the cash box and seems not to have finished his previous activities. While further heading for the counter, the customer has started gazing into another direction. We can see from these details that it actually takes some time between leaving the queue (on the customer’s side) and displaying availability (on the officer’s side) and opening up the face-to-face encounter. It is anything but trivial since it is in this time span that the transition from *imminent* to *current* client takes place.

While the customer keeps on walking towards the counter, the officer has not yet started to monitor the direction from which an imminent client can be expected to arrive. Note that the approaching customer momentarily disappears from the customer-centered camera as visible in images 3.8b and 3.9b.

Extract 3 / part 3.4

From next to current client (limited access of visibility)

Customer: Still on her way to the counter

Image 3.8a (34:11:13)



Officer: Still waiting for monitoring who is next

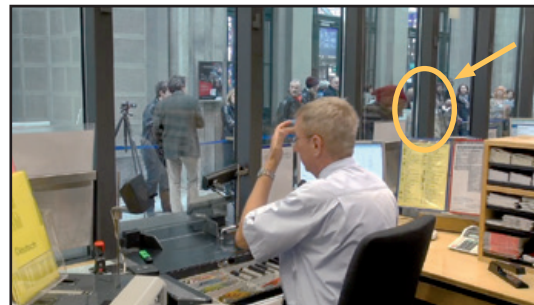
Image 3.8b



Image 3.9a (34:11:24)



Image 3.9b



The customer has now covered about half of the distance between the front of the queue and the counter. The officer is still busy with the cash box and making a self-touch gesture with his left hand. He has not started to monitor who is coming next. There seems to be no relevant variation between 34:11:13 and 34:11:24. An observable difference is that the customer has temporarily disappeared from image 3.9b. She is hidden by one of the metallic pillars between the counter windows – within the perspective of the camera, but also, at some point, within the possible perspective of the officer. As someone routinely awaiting a vast number of imminent clients on their way to his counter, the officer might well know that it makes no sense to monitor who is coming next until at least the last pillar and further obstacles for visibility are passed by. Such a view is confirmed when looking at the very next steps. In order to show the visibility of the imminent client from inside the counter we restrict ourselves to the officer-centered camera perspective (although taking into consideration that there might be some slight variations between these images and the actual perspective of the officer). This reveals an interesting change of visibility between officer and customer.

In images 3.10 and 3.11 the officer is still not doing anything to catch a glimpse of whom is approaching. The customer is again not visible in the camera perspective and may be not in the officer's perspective (image 3.11) either because she is now hidden by a customer in front of a neighboring counter. Apart from the distance, other obstacles are generated by the fact that the customer is approaching from an acute-angled perspective so that other customers at neighboring counters, as well as visual obstacles of the counter itself can temporarily reduce the line of sight. In other words, the imminent client comes into sight in a regularly discontinued way: After she has re-appeared in 3.12 she is again not visible in 3.13 (now hidden by the next pillar). But the officer has now clearly turned his head so that he is ready to see the imminent client as soon as she re-appears in his line of sight. Note that the customer's gaze direction seems to be oriented towards the counter, too (as can be assumed from image 3.12). So, both participants seem to be ready for mutual perception. There is some ground to assume that this fine-tuning is something that the professional officer routinely anticipates when starting his monitoring activities no sooner than when the sight of the imminent client cannot be hindered anymore.

Extract 3 / part 3.5

From next to current client (visibility of customer)

Image 3.10 (34:12:03)

Customer re-appears



Image 3.11 (34:12:13)

Customer re-disappears



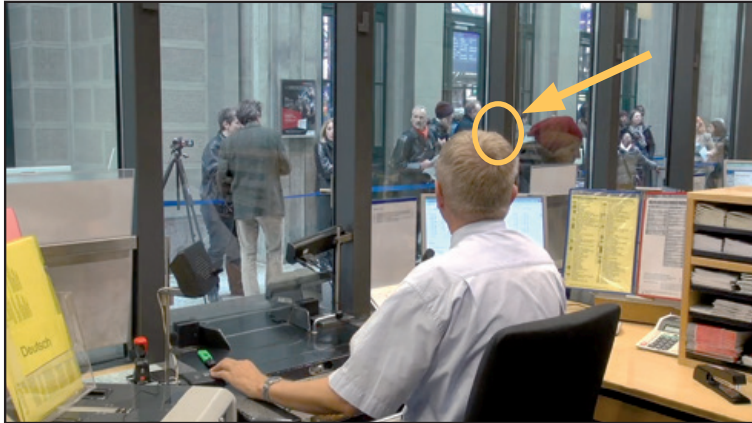
Image 3.12 (34:12:21)

Customer re-appears



Image 3.13 (34:13:08)

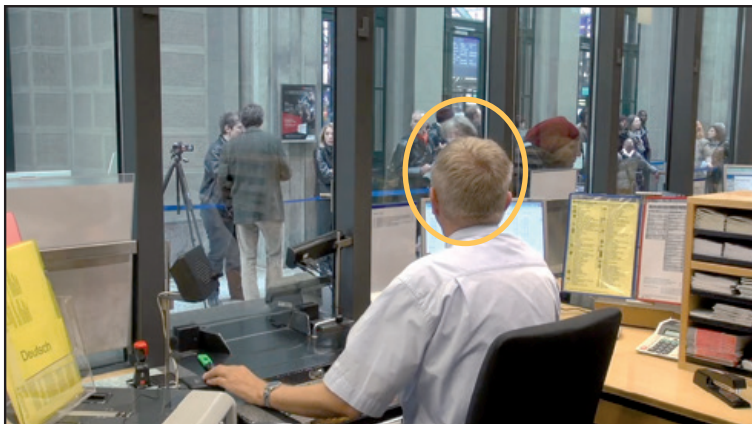
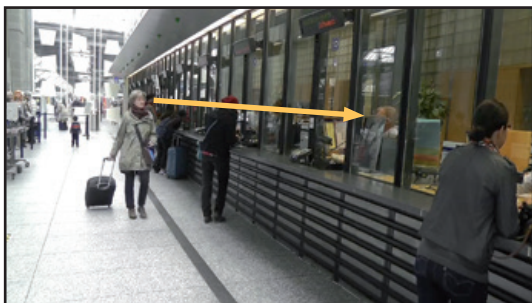
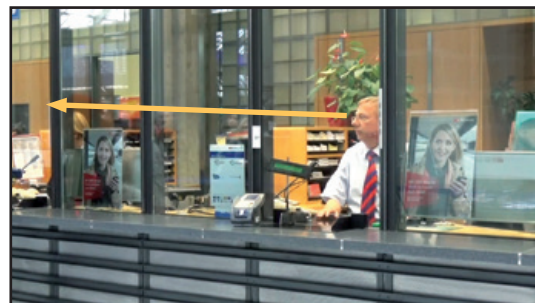
Customer re-disappears



In fact, just after the customer's next re-appearance, the first mutual perception between customer and agent is established.

Extract 3 / part 3.6

Image 3.14a (34:13:18)

Image 3.14a (34:13:18)**Image 3.14b****Image 3.14c**

There is some evidence that we have now reached the very moment when customer and officer come into their immediate presence: the officer has turned to the imminent client, and the imminent-to-current client is looking in his direction (images 3.14a and 3.14b). There seems to be a critical “focal zone” (Streeck 1983, 56) of proximity in which both participants adapt and adjust themselves to be noticed by each other. This zone depends on the particular spatial conditions for visual perception during the customer’s approach: on the passing of visual obstacles of the counter front and the coming closer along the acute-angled route from queue to counter. As can be seen in image 3.14b, the critical focal zone is arrived at somewhere near the point where the imminent client’s route crosses the line marked on the floor.

Extract 3 / part 3.7

Entering the focal zone of proximity

Image 3.14b (34:13:18)



Image 3.14c



Image 3.15a (34:14:00)



Image 3.15b

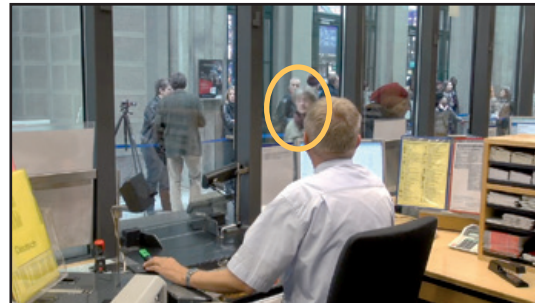
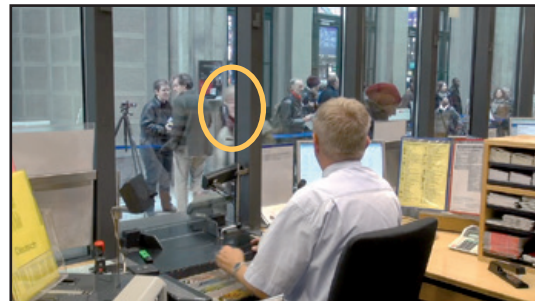


Image 3.16a (34:14:18)



Image 3.16b



We notice that there is a marked line on the ground in front of the counter, just crossed by the customer on image 3.16a: this feature of social design of the counter area seems to contribute to the focal zone of proximity. The practical problem of the customer and the officer – perceiving of being perceived (Hausendorf 2003) while approaching the counter – is apparently treated by the marking on the ground. This line delimits an area close to the counter; moreover, the line itself is visible in such a way to be noticed and respected. One could say that crossing the line actually makes the *imminent* client the *current* client.¹¹ Given the one-queue-for-all-counters system that we have documented in Zurich the dividing line has lost its prior functionality, but still marks a critical focal zone of proximity – as we can assume from the last images. Notwithstanding this, it is, of course, up to the participants to mutually define their concrete zone of proximity; the line on the ground seems to serve as a resource for orientation when approaching the counter. We will come back to this point later on (§ 3.3).

Even though we cannot provide empirical evidence for mutual gaze by eye-tracking data, the video data available document that the moment illustrated in images 3.14a–c is the very moment when both participants orient to each other, i. e. are *able* to perceive being perceived by the other. This is not only displayed by gaze direction (and presumably by eye contact) but also by orienting one's head to the other. Whether the participants have indeed already made eye contact or not, mutual perception can be expected by the participants. That is what the critical focal zone of proximity means. This view can be strengthened when we focus on the way in which the officer is turning his head in a finely adjusted way to the customer's approach and final arrival at the counter. It seems as if the officer is bodily 'receiving' the customer.

Extract 3 / part 3.8

Customer is 'receiving' the arriving customer

Image 3.17a (34:14:00)



Image 3.17b



¹¹ As everybody knows, next clients are asked not to cross the line as long as another client (= the current client) is being served. It is a kind of privacy zone (this often explicitly made on a sign: "keep distance – keep privacy") that was necessary when there were different queues directly in front of the counters some years ago (s. note 5). We return to the relevance of the red line at the end of this section.

Image 3.18a (34:14:18)

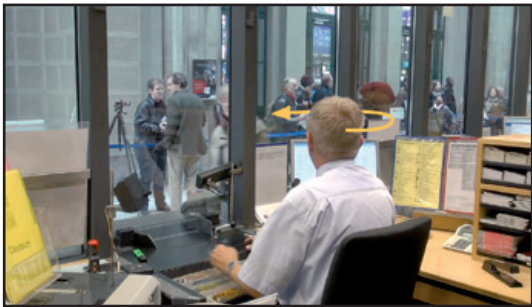


Image 3.18b



Image 3.19a (34:14:21)



Image 3.19b



Image 3.20a (34:15:01)

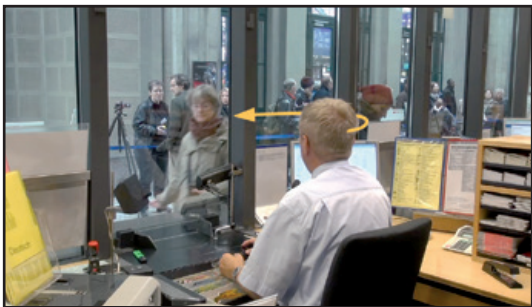


Image 3.20b



Image 3.21a (34:15:15)



Image 3.21b



Both participants keep orienting towards each other (albeit not continuously looking at each other). The customer is continuing her approach to the counter and the officer is accurately turning his head according to the approaching customer. In doing so, he is demonstrating that he is taking part in the customers' approach. He seems to come along with her and in this sense seems to 'receive' the approaching customer as the current client. This is an interesting phenomenon of early and fine-tuned co-ordination. It demonstrates that co-orientation in the sense of joint attention has already been achieved whether an entirely mutual gaze might have taken place (or not). At this moment, we can assume that the interaction between customer and officer is already at work and that the imminent client, by now, has been treated as the *current* client by the officer.

Note that up to now, there is no verbal exchange between customer and officer: silent gaze and an incipient body orientation towards the other characterizes the opening (Mondada 2009). In terms of co-orientation and co-ordination (Deppemann & Schmitt 2007, Hausendorf 2013), the interaction is already launched so that the use of bodily resources obviously precedes the use of language, i. e. the first verbal exchange ("late verballity" in the sense of Mondada & Schmitt 2010b). The *opening* sequence has not yet properly begun, rather the participants are still engaged in the *pre-opening* (Mondada 2010, cf. also Hausendorf & Schmitt 2010). It is within these first moments of co-orientation and early co-ordination in the pre-opening that first suppositions can be drawn by the participants. The customer might, for instance, display a high degree of urgency so that the opening could be accelerated in favor of getting to the reason for the encounter – the first request – most quickly. The officer can also develop first hypotheses as to the social type of customer and the possible type of request (for instance, commuter vs. tourist, local vs. foreigner, ...).

In the present case, the officer starts with a greeting first pair part ("grüezi"/"hello") while the customer has not yet completed her arrival.

Extract 3 / part 3.9

Image 3.22a (34:15:20)



Image 3.22b

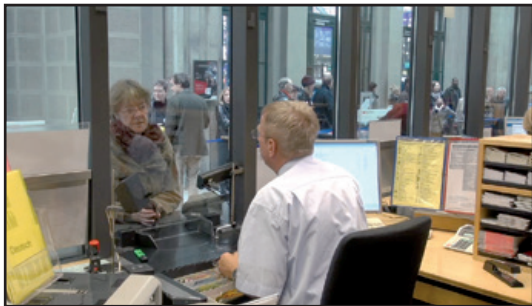


Officer: "GRÜEzi: WA:S hetet si gern."¹²
"Hello what would you like"

¹² Capitals signal when talk co-occurs with the stills.

Image 3.22c

Arriving has not yet been completed

**Image 3.23a (34:18:03)**

Customer: “s HALBS, GONTenschwil (.) Retour.”
 “half¹³ Gontenschwil [= toponym] return”

Image 3.23b**Image 3.23c**

Customer having ensconced herself at the counter



When the officer’s “grüezi” is uttered, the customer has not yet positioned herself in front of the counter but is still engaged in *arriving* at the counter (images 3.22a–c). She has yet not ‘ensconced’ herself at the counter – which implies actions such as turning, parking and unhanding the trolley, turning her body vis-à-vis the counter and bending over, leaning on the counter. Images 3.23a–c show the variation of the customer’s position as a result of such ensconcing activities.

¹³ Refers to SBB 50% reduction card (“Halbtax”).

Ensconsing oneself in front of the counter can be seen as a part of the opening sequence that is up to the customer as the mobile partner who is ‘coming in’. It follows the preceding co-orientation and co-ordination and it occurs in overlap with the first spoken words by the officer. In fact, the officer’s invitation for a request (“was hetet sie gern?”) is finished precisely when the customer has taken her final position. Resulting from this fine-tuning, the customer can formulate her request exactly when she has completely arrived at the counter (images 3.23a–c) – an impressive example for micro-achievements of co-orientation, co-ordination and co-operation.

In spite of the verbal transcript that suggests a clear sequence from the opening to the reason for the visit in the officer’s first two utterances (“grüezi was hetet sie gern”), the multimodal analysis reveals that the opening and transition to the request partly overlap. Instead of a strict sequentiality suggested by the verbal transcript, there is simultaneity due to activities belonging to the opening sequence, namely the customer’s approach and arrival at the counter. Although the agent’s invitation for a request verbally initiates the transition from opening to the reasons of the encounter, it can also be understood as coming along with the customer’s arrival, filling and bridging the time that it takes for the customer to ensconce herself at the counter (see Mondada 2009). That also holds for the greeting (“grüezi”). Inspected on its own, one could wonder why it comes alone (without a second pair part)¹⁴ and is immediately followed by the invitation for request. The multimodal video analysis provides evidence that the task of the initial opening is already done when the greeting appears (see images 3.17–3.21). With respect to the establishment of perceived perception, the greeting is in fact dispensable – and it is treated as such by the participants themselves. The greeting can then serve other functions, among which is giving time to the customer to complete her arrival at the counter without being treated as late. The same holds for the invitation to utter the request (“was hetet si gern”) that can be taken as dispensable as well since the arrival at the counter predefines the one who is arriving as the current client as coming with a request. But the invitation for the request gives the customer some more time to ‘arrive’. It might also add a flavor of institutional courtesy to the beginning of the episode defining the person in front of the counter not only as the current but as a *most welcome* client invited to be served by a welcoming officer.

To sum up, our first case study and to return to the transition from *next* to *imminent* to *current* client, it is important to notice that this represents a case with a late start of face-to-face interaction between customer and officer. Since the front of the queue cannot easily be monitored by the officer behind the counter, the transition from imminent to current client takes place somewhere between the front of the queue and the area directly in front of the counter. There is a critical focal zone of proximity – near to the place

¹⁴ Note that it cannot be strictly excluded that there is a preceding greeting by the customer in this case – for example in the form of a nod while she is hidden from the camera behind a pillar.

where the imminent client's route crosses the dividing line – in which mutual perception becomes possible and in which it typically occurs for the first time. It is within this zone that the imminent client finally becomes the current client. The focal zone of proximity is by no means fixed or prescribed. It is interactively achieved and it is interactively adjusted if necessary – as becomes obvious when the transition between imminent and current client does not work or at least does not go smoothly. We will now complete our inspection of the Zurich windowpane setting by analyzing such hitches.

3.3 Some hitches

Some customers' approaches do not proceed as smoothly as in the case just studied.

Let us look at an encounter that stems from counter 11, which is even a bit farther from the front of the queue than counter 10 studied above. We join the action just after the officer has displayed her availability by pressing the button. At some stage, she begins to lean the upper part of her body forward and bend her head in order to see if someone is approaching.

Extract 4 / part 4.1

(ZHoct_Win_Sch11_Pers3_Gespr4)¹⁵: Looking for the next client

Image 4.1a (24:08:07)



Image 4.1b

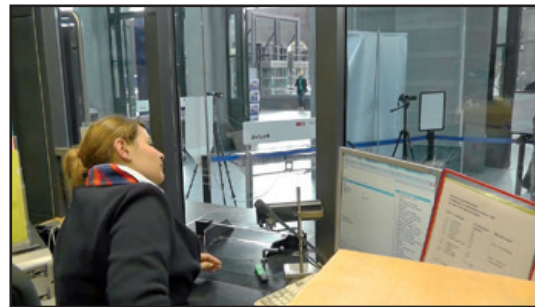


Image 4.1c

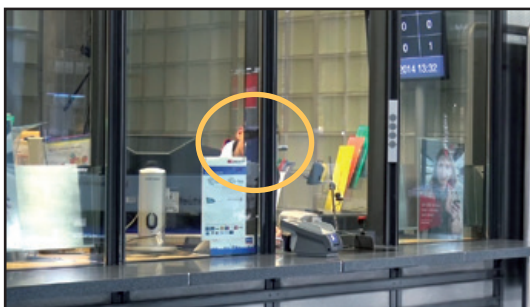
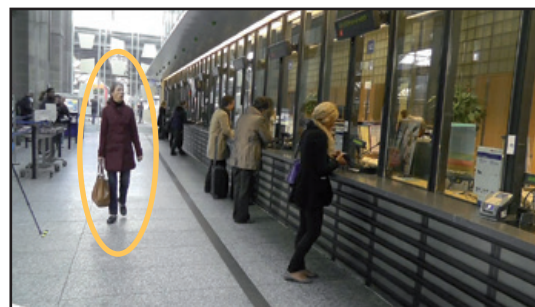


Image 4.1d



¹⁵ We have already used this example to show that and how bodily activities step in when the technical display of availability proves to be insufficient (s. above 2.1).

The approaching customer has yet not reached a zone of proximity that allows for mutual perception. That is why the officer has to make much more extensive use of her body as remaining seated with her back against the backrest of her chair does not allow for a sufficient sight. According to the officer's routine anticipation, the (expected) customer's approach seemingly takes too long and raises the suspicion that something might have gone wrong. And in fact, there is something that does not work out. The next client is obviously uncertain to which counter to turn to. She slows down her approach and gives some facial display of being confused as to the next available counter. She even interrupts her approach and stops for a short moment.

Extract 4 / part 4.2

Image 4.2a (24:09:22)

Customer stops in the middle of a 'no man's land'



Image 4.2b

Waving to the imminent-to-current client



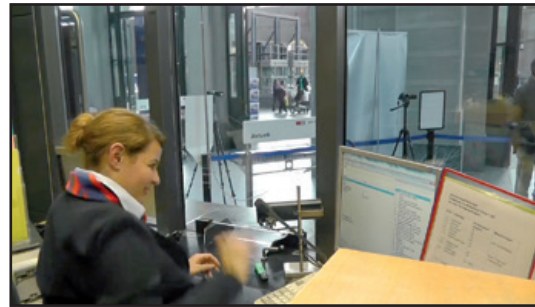
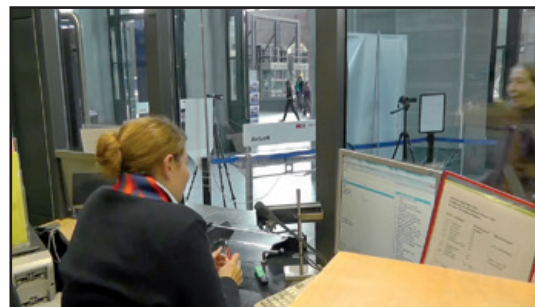
Image 4.2c



That is the moment when the officer successfully intervenes by making eye-contact and waving and smiling at the confused customer (image 4.2a). In doing so, the customer is successfully guided to the available counter and can continue her approach – not without a display of understanding and appreciation.

Extract 4 / part 4.3

Getting restarted

Image 4.3a (24:10:17)**Image 4.3b****Image 4.4a (24:12:05)****Image 4.4b**

The last images (4.3a, 4.4a, 4.4b) show the customer entering the zone of focal proximity. The present case of a momentarily confused imminent client illustrates that and how this focal zone can be extended by the agent – which, of course, requires a much more extensive use of one's body, as we could see. And again, all this happens (long) before the first words are spoken.

Note that this is not a singular case. Hitches sometimes have obviously to do with conditions of limited visual access, caused by the visual obstacles of the counter architecture and by the partly reflecting windowpane between customer and officer. Now we will turn to a last example, which shows a customer who has stopped before entering a zone of proximity that for her seems to be a critical zone:

Extract 5 / part 5.1

(ZH_Win_Sch11_Pers4_Gespr28) — The customer's approach

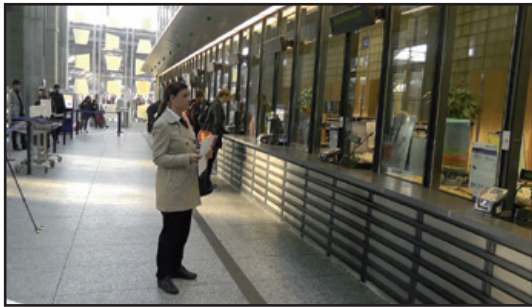
Image 5.1 (01:04:11:20)

Customer walks towards the counter



Image 5.2a (01:04:15:11)

Customer stops before the dividing line

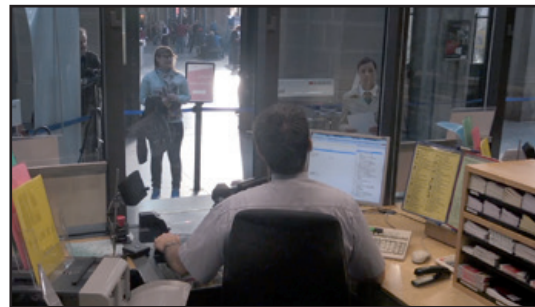


There seems to be some sort of an intermediary stop when the customer has started to wonder which counter is the next available one (as in the foregoing example) or if the one she is heading for is already free. This seems to be the case in our present example when the customer stops somewhere near to the line marked on the floor (image 5.2).

We observe again that and how the officer intervenes in such a case by extending the zone of focal proximity. This is achieved by raising his head, by orienting his upper body to the customer and through his gaze.

Extract 5 / part 5.2

Officer invites the customer by head and body movement and eye contact

Image 5.2b (01:04:15:11)**Image 5.2c****Image 5.2d**

These examples show the interactive achievement of becoming the *current* client much more inconspicuously than when everything goes smoothly.

4 Queuing from afar at the open counter in Lugano

As shown in the previous extracts, the windowpane constitutes the counter an isolated workplace, building a more or less opaque/transparent wall that can become an obstacle for the organization of the conjunction of the participants to open the encounter. But, as the following excerpt demonstrates, obstacles are not merely produced by the window – rather, they are related to the organization of the queue / the queuing space as well as the particular spatial and architectural disposition of the counters.

Queuing, waiting for the next available counter, monitoring when the waiting client becomes the next client are all actions that routinely characterize the activity of officers as well as customers. Both orient to the minimization of waiting time and the maximization of customer flow. This crucially relies on the *visibility* of both the waiting customer and the available counter. This visibility can be supported and displayed through electronic technologies (the electronic display of the free counter's number, activated by the officer and monitored by the customer: see above § 3.1). It is also accomplished by the active and embodied looking, glancing, monitoring, checking by the customers who are observing the activity at the counters and exhibiting themselves as next, as well as by the officers observing the customers' queuing and exhibiting their own availability.

This visibility depends in important ways on the spatial disposition of *both* the queue and the counter. The following extract shows the practical problems encountered by customers and officers in an *open space with limited visibility*, as well as the practical solutions mobilized by them.

We join the action in Lugano while the counters closer to the queuing point are busy with some customers, whereas the officer at the most peripheral counter, the most distant from the queue, is working at his computer, individually in absence of customers. When a new customer enters the office space, the officer is still focused on his computer. The customer arrives at the queuing point and stops, orienting to the fact that the counters in front of her are busy with other customers. In doing so, she makes herself accountable as the next client. She does not notice that there is a free counter on her far right. The officer has not seen her either. The customer is spotted by another officer, who consequently does two things: first, he addresses his colleague, announcing the presence of a next client (*>c'è la signora<* / "there is the lady"), and then, 1.3 seconds later, he addresses the customer, inviting her to walk towards them (*PREGO?* / "please?"). It is interesting to note that the announcement to the colleague refers to the customer using the definite (vs. indefinite) article (it. *la* vs. *una*), which supposes the evidence of the customer's presence.

In this case, there is no electronic device to select the next client and to display the availability of the counter; this operation is left to participants within the open space, supposing their mutual visibility and accessibility. But this results in problematic cases, such as this one, in which there is an obstruction to this visibility: the queue starts behind a pillar, which covers the customer's view of the counter and the officer's view of the

customer. The solution to this problem is a human, and collaborative one, achieved with loud talk and visible gesture by a colleague.

Here is the verbal transcript of the extract, in Italian.

Extract 6

(LU_oct_OPEN_spo7_left_pers2_new 7.21–8.30)

- | | | |
|----|-------------|---|
| 1 | AGE2 | c'è la signora.<
<i>>there is the lady.<</i> |
| 2 | | (1.3) |
| 3 | AGE2 | PREGO?
<i>PLEASE?</i> |
| 4 | | (4.1) |
| 5 | AGE1 | buongiorno.
<i>good morning</i> |
| 6 | CLI | buongiorno.
<i>good morning</i> |
| 7 | | (0.3) |
| 8 | CLI | un biglietto per milano centrale
<i>a ticket to Milano Centrale</i> |
| 9 | | alle quindici e °trentaquattro°
<i>at fifteen and °thirty-four°</i> |
| 10 | | (2.3) |
| 11 | AGE1 | °okay° |
| 12 | | (4.9) |

In order to better understand how the opening is achieved in this case, as well as its fine-tuned temporality, we turn to the ELAN-supported transcript¹⁶ of the same excerpt. This kind of transcript is produced by connecting the relevant transcription and annotation to a continuous timeline, showing the timing of each action (Mondada 2007). In the following ELAN transcription, the vertical line visible in all the excerpts refers to the precise moment corresponding to the screen shot (the image) in such a way that the perfect timing of the still accompanying the text is indicated within the transcript and can be precisely related to the temporality of the participants' actions.

We join the action again as the customer is entering the office space. Agent₁ is busy at the computer and Agent₂ is standing behind him. The customer is visible in the back, walking towards the first pillar, which will then hide her.

16 ELAN is software developed by the MPI, <https://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/> [22. 3. 2017].

Extract 6 / part 6.1

	00:00.000	00:00.000
AGE1 [9]	busy at the computer	
AGE2 [3]		
CLI [6]	walks in in the office space	

Image 6.1a

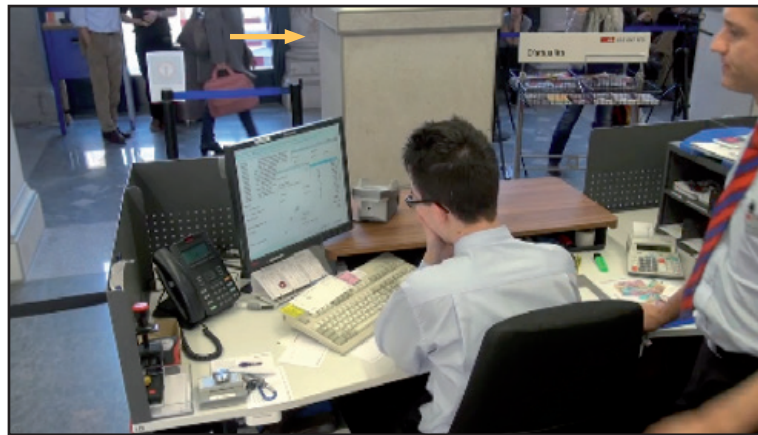


Image 6.1b

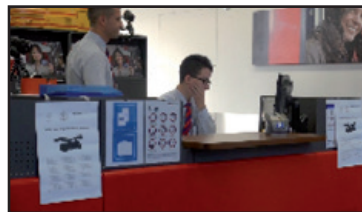
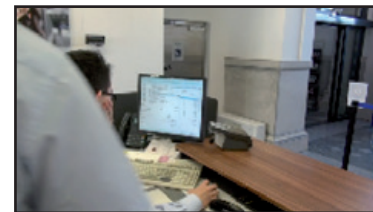


Image 6.1c



In this position, it is possible for both agents to see the customer walking in front of them behind the pillar; but this is not publicly oriented to as relevant at this stage (the customer has just entered and she may address various services within the office space; the agents do not look directly at her, although they might see her in their peripheral vision). At this point, the lady is only a *potential/possible* client, but not yet the *relevant next* client for the agents.

A few seconds later, Agent2 moves away from Agent1; at this point, he is in the position of seeing the customer moving forward towards the queuing point.

Extract 6 / part 6.2

	00:00.000	00:00:02.000	00:00:04.000
AGE1 [9]	busy at the computer		
AGE2 [3]		looks towards the clients' corridor	
CLI [6]	walks in in the office space; passes 1	passes 2d pillar	

Image 6.2



As shown by image 6.2, Agent1 is clearly busy with his monitor, while Agent2 is in the positioned to see the progression of the customer along the corridor. This allows him to project

the progression of her walk, even when she is not continuously visible behind one or the other pillar.

A little bit later, Agent2 announces the presence of the customer and summons her:

Extract 6 / part 6.3

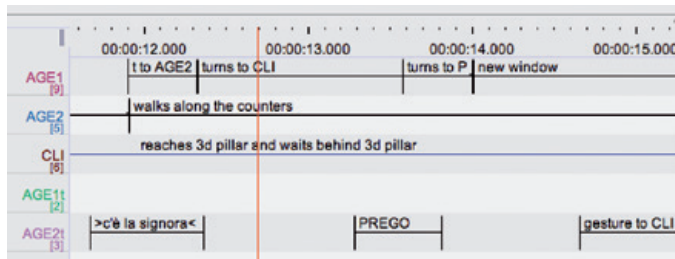


Image 6.3a



Image 6.3c



Image 6.3d

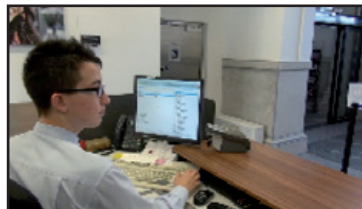


Image 6.3b

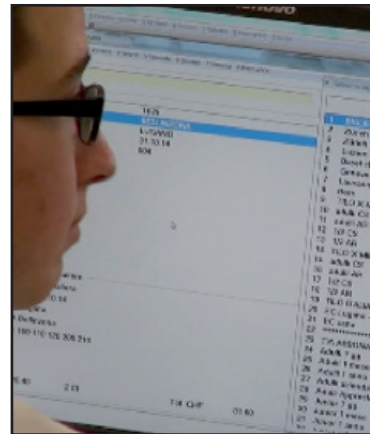


Image 6.3e



Agent2 is now standing against the wall, monitoring the entire office space. He can see the customer progressing behind the pillars, and announces her presence to Agent1. Immediately Agent1 turns first to him, and then to the customer, not yet visible to him behind the pillar. As soon as Agent2 produces a loud *PREGO*/"please", Agent1 turns back to his computer and creates a new window. In this way, he orients to the imminent opening and prepares for it. Interestingly, he completely delegates the management of the customer to his colleague, who not only verbally invites her to move towards the counter, but also bodily through a gesture, while he walks towards her.

This extract shows the perfect coordination between Agent2 orienting to the client, and Agent1 orienting to his action and preparing for the imminent client.

Next, the Customer responds to the summons.

Extract 6 / part 6.4

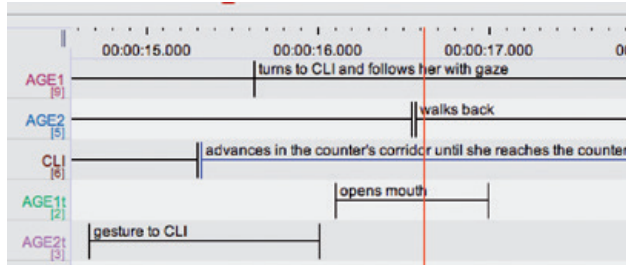


Image 6.4a



Image 6.4c



Image 6.4d



Image 6.4b

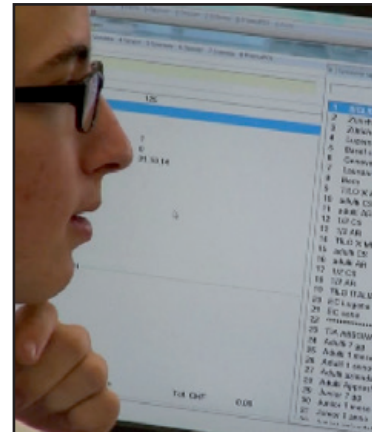
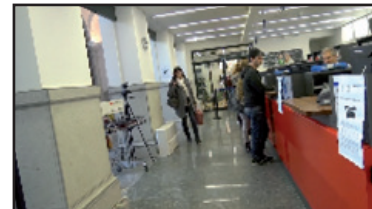


Image 6.4e



The customer responds to Agents2's summons – with the gesture and *PREGO* – by walking forward and along the range of counters. During her walk approaching his counter, Agent1 looks at her, monitors her progression and establishes an early possible mutual gaze with her. He also opens his mouth, without saying a word, but projects a possible greeting or a *prego*. So, as soon as the customer is visible in the space along the counters, the agent visibly turns to her.

Meanwhile, Agent2 returns to his initial standing position and does not engage any more in this encounter. So, when the contact between Agent1 and customer is established, Agent2 withdraws from the encounter, after having facilitated it by his summons.

Next, the encounter proper begins.

Extract 6 / part 6.5

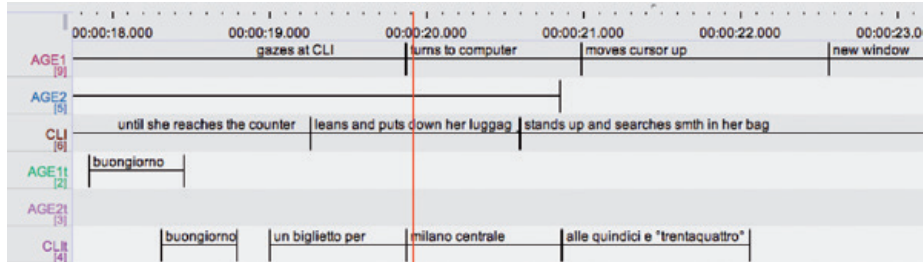


Image 6.5a



Image 6.5b

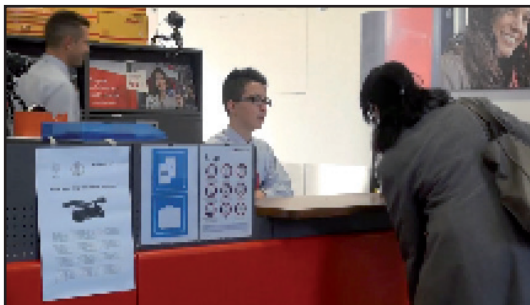
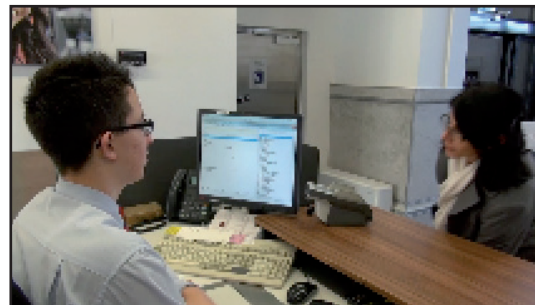


Image 6.5c



The temporality of the greeting sequence is interesting here: the agent greets the customer before she has actually reached the counter. She immediately responds with the same greeting in partial overlap. So, the greetings are produced in a context of mutual gaze, but before a face-to-face interactional space has been constituted.

Moreover, the customer initiates her request (*un biglietto per milano centrale* / “a ticket to Milano Centrale”) before actually reaching the counter; furthermore, before fully reaching the counter, she leans down and puts her luggage on the floor – although she

maintains mutual visual contact with the agent. Before standing up again, she begins to search for her wallet in her bag. In this way, she engages in several activities parallel to her request and preparatory for it, while already initiating it. This allows the exchange to progress swiftly.

Likewise, the agent turns to the computer immediately after the beginning of the request (after *un biglietto per* / “a ticket for”), responding to the recognizable action that is emerging in the turn and projecting the relevant actions that will fulfill the request (opening a new window for issuing the new ticket). In this way, he is ready to enter the destination and the departure time when, within the progression of the customer’s turn, she delivers this information.

In sum, this excerpt shows how problems of visibility generated by material obstacles – here the architecture of the office space – hinder the smoothness of the transition between a customer and the officer, but also how these problems are practically handled by the participants – collaboratively enhancing and displaying the accessibility and availability of the service. As we shall confirm in the next analyses, this also demonstrates the importance of the spatial location and disposition of the counter: the last, peripheral, counter in a row has accessibility that differs from that of the central counters, which are maximally visible and face the queue. We now turn to the latter for a systematic analysis of the visible affordances that this location and visibility make possible.

5 Queuing in front of the open counter in Geneva

Queuing in an institutional setting is a routine and recurrent phenomenon that makes its methodic organization observable, as one customer leaves the queue after the other and approaches an agent for the transaction. The following analysis accounts for this methodical order, and shows the systematicity of the way in which both customers and agents routinely complete the transition from current to next (and past) customer (from the perspective of the agent), and from waiting to imminent and current customer (from the perspective of the customer).

The sub-set of data examined here comes from yet another queuing disposition, in which a unique zigzag line, drawn by stripes, is organized in front of a series of counters. The customer entering the door of the ticketing office space finds the zigzag line immediately in front of the entrance and enters the queue. The front of the queue is situated in front of a range of counters. More specifically, the counter we focus on in this analysis is situated exactly in front of the front of the line: it is the counter that directly faces the next client. This disposition has organizational consequences, which manifest in exemplary ways the subtle coordination between the agent, the current and the next customer.

The issue tackled in the following analysis concerns the following questions about the initiation of the opening. *How* is the opening launched? *Who* initiates the opening

of the next encounter? More importantly, *when* is the opening initiated? More particularly, *how early* can the next client be addressed / step in? In a situation in which many customers are queuing, this concerns not only the action of the imminent customer, but the smooth transition between the previous client and the next, that is, the closing of the previous encounter and the opening of the next. In this recurrent organization, resources like mutual gaze and stepping forward are crucial: one question concerns how early – possibly while the previous client is still leaving – mutual gaze is established and when greetings and even requests are uttered – possibly while the next client is still walking in.

The analysis begins with a focus on the action of the next client and its multimodal organization; further developments of the analysis deal with the coordination between previous and next and the timing of the mobilization of diverse multimodal resources.

5.1 Becoming the next client after the previous has left

The first excerpt shows how the person waiting in line becomes the next client, within the opening of the encounter with the agent.

Extract 7

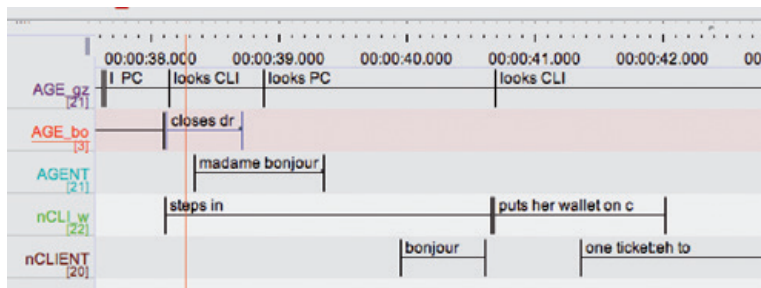


Image 7.1



This opening presents a case in which the customer steps in as soon as the agent looks at her.

Just prior to this, the agent looks at his computer screen, while the previous customer leaves the counter. He then gazes up at the customer waiting in front of him, while at the same time closing the drawer in front of him, where he has put the money paid by the previous client. In this way, the agent organizes the visible transition from the previous encounter to the next: he looks at the next customer as he closes the drawer (see extract 7, image 7.1).

The customer monitors his activities, and as he turns his gaze to her, she immediately steps in.

Slightly after the beginning of their mutual gaze, the agent greets her (*madame bonjour* / “madam good morning”). She responds with another greeting (*bonjour* / “good morning”) with a slight delay (0.5 seconds approximately): the completion of her greeting coincides with her arrival at the counter and seems to be coordinated with it. At that point, she places her wallet on the counter and utters her request.

In this case, the customer steps in at the precise moment in which she is gazed at; the greeting sequence is completed precisely as she stands in front of the counter. The agent organizes his availability by briefly looking at the computer after having gazed at the previous client leaving the counter, and before gazing at the next client, and by closing the drawer (a manual action that often implies a movement of the torso too – repositioning his body – and produces a audible sound).

This timing shows a) the initiation of the *opening* by both participants after the completion of the closing of the previous encounter and with the establishment of mutual gaze, and b) the initiation of the *beginning* (with the reason of the visit) in a specific temporal-sequential position, once the interactional space of the encounter at the counter, has stabilized.

5.2 Earlier initiation of the opening by the Agent, while the closing is ongoing

In the previous case, there is a simultaneous alignment of the agent gazing at the customer and the customer stepping in. In other cases, the opening can be initiated earlier, for example by the agent gazing at the new customer as the closing of the previous encounter is still on-going, or by the customer walking in early. The timing of the responses also varies.

In the following extract, the agent looks at the next customer relatively early, as the closing of the previous transaction is not yet completed.

Extract 8

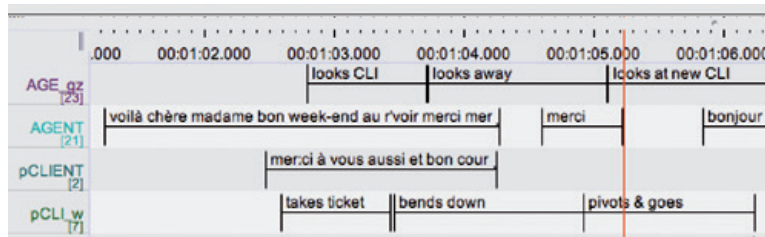
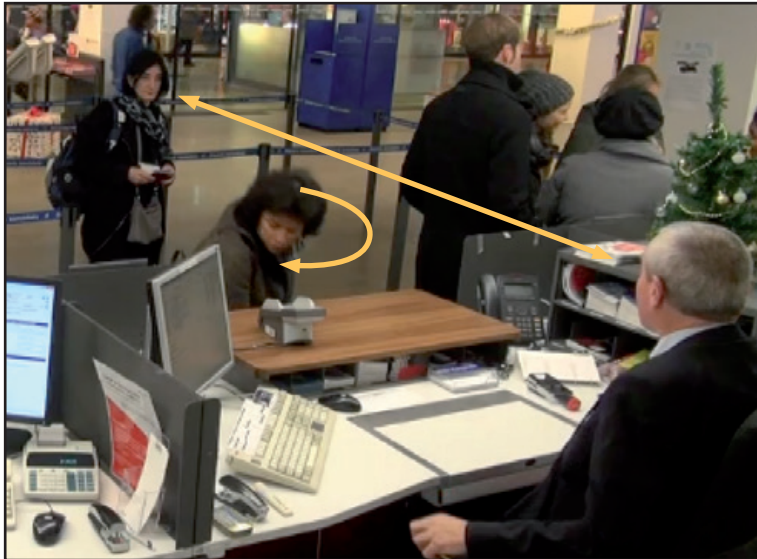


Image 8.1



This excerpt shows how the specific configuration of the closing impinges on the way in which the next opening is initiated.

The agent closes with a quite elaborated format (*voilà chère madame bon week-end au revoir merci merci* / “there it is dear ma’am have a nice week-end good bye thank you thank you”), which is also responded to with a complex turn (*merci à vous aussi et bon courage* / “thanks to you too and good luck”). The first part of the agent’s turn co-occurs with him giving the train ticket to the customer; the customer responds while grasping the ticket. These paired actions constitute the completion of the transaction, before the greetings. During the greetings, the customer bends down to retrieve her bag, and at this point the agent looks away to his left. This gazing away beforegazing at the next customer seems to be a recurrent practice in the data (see also the previous extract, where the agent briefly looked at the PC before looking at the next customer). This organizes the transition of the gaze from previous to next through an intermediate phase, disconnected from the prior but not yet connected to the next.

This transition phase is extended here by the movement of the customer bending down, then standing up and pivoting away. As a consequence, the agent looks at the

new client as the previous is still departing (see Extract 8, image 8.1). He orients to this *early* gaze by greeting the new customer a bit later (*bonjour* / “good morning”), that is, *not* immediately, but clearly later than in the previous excerpt. Likewise, the new client responds a bit later, also orienting to the timing of the previous client’s movement.

Extract 9

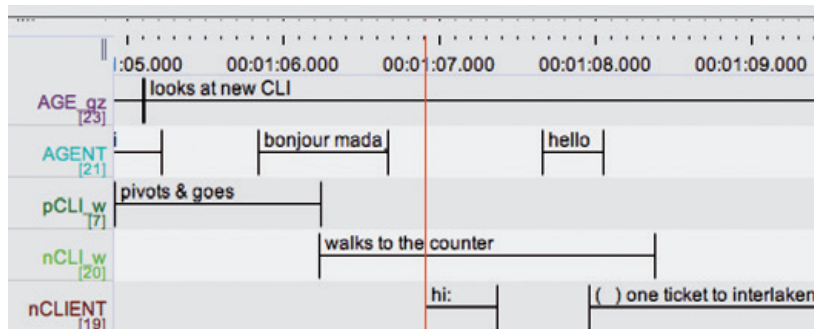


Image 9.1



First, the agent looks at the new client, then he greets her. Her response, first in the embodied form of walking, occurs as soon as the previous client has left the space in front of the counter. Her second response, in the verbal form of a greeting (*hi::*), occurs as she is still walking towards the counter.

Interestingly, in this case, the second pair part of the greeting disaligns with the language choice of the first pair part, switching from French into English; this occasions a third greeting on the side of the agent (*hello*), which further delays the production of the reason of the visit.

Nonetheless, the reason of the visit is produced *before* the customer actually reaches the counter. This shows that although responsive greetings may be *delayed* – by a common orientation to the extended leave-taking of the previous customer – the reason for

the visit can be still produced *early* – i. e. before a stabile interactional space is established at the counter. This in turn shows the orientation of the participants to the timing not only of the *opening* but also of the *beginning* – that is of the business at hand (for more on this distinction, see Mondada 2010).

5.3 Earlier initiation of the opening by the Customer: displaying urgency

While in the previous extract the opening was initiated early *by the agent's* orientation to the late departure of the previous customer, in the following extract the opening is initiated early *by the customer*, displaying urgency and therefore accounting for it.

Extract 10

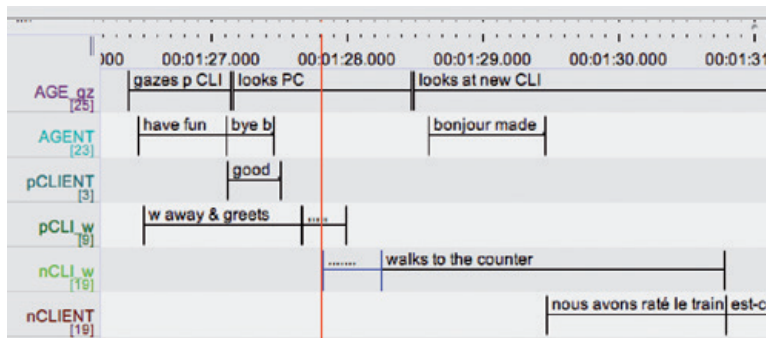


Image 10.1



The closing of the previous encounter is achieved in a timely way, with both greetings overlapping and the customer moving away and waving her hand towards the agent. During the greetings, the agent also disengages visually, by looking back at his computer.

The opening of the next encounter is initiated by the customers as the agent is still looking at his screen (see image 10.1). The customer begins to step in early, before a mutual gaze has been established. The customers are a couple of girls, one of which who initiates and leads the encounter, while the other one stays a bit behind her – this organization of the couple is oriented to by the agent, who addresses the first with a singular address term

As soon as the agent looks at the customer, he sees her coming towards him and greets her (*bonjour mademoiselle* / “good morning miss”). The customer does not produce a greeting as a second pair part, but immediately (almost in latching, as soon as the first greeting has been uttered) states the reason of the visit (*nous avons raté le train, est-ce que c’est possible de changer le billet?* / “we missed the train, is it possible to change the ticket?”). Her turn is composed by an account prefacing the actual request, formatted with an interrogative. The account in first position highlights the contingency and urgency of the case, while the request in an interrogative format displays low entitlement.

In this case, the early initiation and the absence of greetings in return is oriented to by the customer herself, by her account and the specific nature of the request.

Thus, the encounter is generally initiated by the gaze switch of the agent (after a transition phase in which he/she gazes away) establishing mutual gaze with the customer; the latter steps towards the counter after this initial gaze. Both take into account the timing of the closing and leaving of the previous customer – for example, if the previous customer is delaying her departure, the agent may initiate an early exchange of gazes, delaying the greetings and progressively initiating the opening; the next customer may step in immediately if the space of the counter is free, but may delay movement if the previous customer takes time to leave. Early initiations by the customer are accountably produced as exhibiting urgency or exceptional circumstances, and possibly accounted for with an explicit formulation.

5.4 Agent’s orientation towards the late customer’s request

This orientation towards the precise timing of the opening is also observable in a systematic micro-practice that is recurrent in the data: the delayed request by the customer is addressed by the agent uttering a summon in the form of an address term after the greetings.

In the next case, the closing with the previous customer is swiftly achieved and the next client steps forward quickly.

Extract 11 / part 11.1

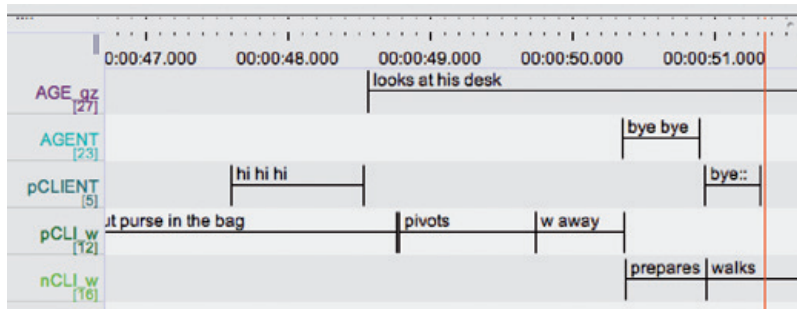


Image 11.1



The closing greetings with the previous customer are exchanged after she has already left the counter. Consequently, now the counter is free, but the agent is looking down at his desk, placing the money in the drawer (see arrow in image 11.1). At that point the new client is already stepping in (see arrow in image 11.1). Thus, she orients to the free space, rather than to the agent's gaze, to initiate the next encounter.

But as she reaches the counter, her request is delayed:

Extract 11 / part 11.2

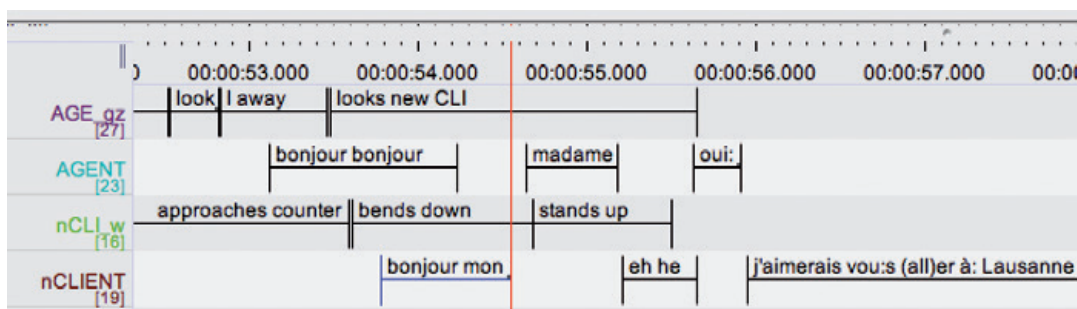


Image 11.2a



Image 11.2b



The agent sees her approaching and greets her (*bonjour bonjour* / “good morning good morning”). She responds (*bonjour monsieur* / “good morning sir”), as she reaches the counter and also begins to bend down to put her bag on the floor. So at the end of the greeting sequence, she is not yet available for the next action, which she is expected to initiate: the reason for the visit. At this point, she is still bending down, not yet saying anything: the agent is waiting for the next action (see images 11.2a/11.2b, both synchronized with the end of her greetings as second pair part).

The agent orients to this absence of initiation of the request sequence by uttering an address term (*madame* / “madam”), working as a summons and inviting her to produce the next action. As a response, she produces a slight laughter (*eh he*) but not yet the request. This is oriented to again by the Agent with a *oui:?* / “yes:?” stretched and with a raising intonation. At that point, she utters her request (*j’aimerais vou:s (all)er à lausanne aller-retour* / “I would like you: (g)o to Lausanne and return”) – which noticeably contains various self-repairs and hesitations.

In this case, although the customer has moved swiftly to the counter, thereby initiating the opening quite early, the agent orients to the delay of the beginning of the encounter. This shows the orientation of the agent towards a swift progression of the transaction. This also confirms that the management of the opening and of the beginning might follow very different temporal and sequential trajectories.

5.5 Intermediary conclusion

These analyses have shown a range of systematic variations in the organization of the opening, showing that they strongly relate to the specificities of the setting, the spatial environment and the praxeological context (i. e., the actions and activities going on before or in parallel to the actual encounter). These variations show that the opening can be initiated either by the agent or by the customer, mobilizing resources such as estab-

lishing mutual gaze, or taking steps, also orienting to other's actions, such as closing the drawer, which are closing implicative. The opening can also be initiated either early or late, as a result of adjusting to a diversity of accountable contingencies – for example an extended departure from the counter by the previous client or legitimate reasons for the imminent client being in a hurry. In this sense, the opening of the next encounter is closely dependent on the closing of the previous one, which is monitored by the next customer and managed by the agent orienting both to the completion of the leave-taking and to the projection of the imminent conjunction. In this sense, the transition is not only achieved by two parties – the agent and the customer – but by three – including the previous and the next customer, and possibly future customers waiting in the queue. Moreover, the temporality of the opening may be distinct from the temporal-sequential initiation and organization of the beginning of the encounter, corresponding to the reason for the visit. An early opening can be followed by a late beginning.

These contingencies are handled in methodic and therefore systematic ways, displaying the fine-tuned orientation of the participants to the temporality and sequentiality of the interaction, understood by them as crucially situated.

Further developments of this systematic analysis will address the effect of the absence vs. presence as well as short vs. long queue on the temporality of the transition between one encounter and another – the longer the queue is, the bigger the temporal pressure on all the parties.

6 Taking the turn without queuing: queuing management systems in Basel and Zürich

The consequences of the design of the counter have been highlighted at several occasions. We have shown that the distinction between windowpane counter vs. open counter is more complex than it seems at first sight, and that other features of the local ecology have to be taken into consideration for differentiating the management of approaching clients. Our analyses show that in all the cases queuing and approaching the counter are achieved in ordered, publicly accountable, methodic ways, relying on micro-practices that are adjusted to the local environment. In this section, we examine the systematicity of these practices in a setting in which customers are served at an open counter after having been selected by means of an electronic queuing management system, distributing numbers at the entrance.

In all the cases we have studied so far, there is a physical queue (more or less) close to the row of counters. The physical queue allows for the transition from possible clients to waiting clients. Enqueuing means for a person to become recognizable as a client waiting to be served. This recognition can be achieved by other clients (within and outside

the same queue) as well as by the officers behind the counters (as far as visible access between the queue and the counter is guaranteed, at least to some extent). Moreover, the ordering of the next clients is made visible within the line of participants standing one after the other. Temporal successivity (for getting their turn at the counter) is manifested and announced by spatial successivity. The queue is an embodied social organization. The *waiting client* is accordingly a relevant social category that is established by the praxeology of queuing. It necessarily implies unfocused (face-to-back) interaction between queuing clients and allows for a smooth transition from unfocused to focused interaction between the officer and the next client (i. e. the one who is at the front of the queue: see the Geneva cases in § 5 above).

An alternative to these physical queues is constituted by computerized system virtually arranging the access and the order of next clients to the counter. The computer system transforms the social organization of getting one's turn - and consequently also of opening sequences. The physical queue of waiting clients, characterized by a personalized and embodied sequential order, is replaced by an abstract order of numbers. The numbers to be served are displayed by monitors. The allocation of numbers to customers is done by numbered tickets individually distributed by ticket machines. Once a waiting customer has gotten a ticket, there is no need to queue with others and wait together. The issue is rather to keep track of the monitor displaying the next number to be served. Customers can even leave the counter area when there is reason to assume that it will take a long time till their number will appear on the screen. Getting the turn by means of co-presence is replaced by getting the turn by means of watching the screen.

Waiting becomes an individual practice that allows for solitary activities (such as reading) and, as already mentioned, even for absence. This directly affects the issue of how openings are consequently organized. To some extent, the *waiting* clients and especially the *next* client seem to disappear from the scene as far as their social accountability is concerned: they are no longer visible for others (in the way they are visible within a queue). Of course, there is a waiting area with seats (that we will describe in § 6.1) but it cannot be taken for granted that each and everybody within this area is a waiting client. And vice versa, not all waiting clients have to be present in this area (as we will show in § 6.2). Accordingly, the social roles of the *next* and *imminent* client seem to almost coincide with each other. It is not before it his/her turn that the customer emerges on the scene as the accountable next-to-imminent client – whereas in the physical queue the next client is clearly present before it is his or her turn. We will demonstrate this important change in the social organization of taking turns in the queue with cases taken from Basel (§ 6.1) and Zurich (§ 6.2). Both Basel and Zurich main station possess a service area with computerized systems (in addition to their windowpane counter settings studied above in § 2.1).

6.1 Waiting and walking to the counter (Basel)

Queuing in a setting where a computer supported system manages the distribution of customers to the various counters is implemented in a series of actions by the officer and the customer that are sequentially organized although not coordinated in a face-to-face situation. Waiting and queuing, as well as waiting and going to the counter are managed first as separate actions of participants not yet in a state of interaction. The following analysis describes these trajectories up to the opening of the encounter. The customer's case begins as the officer activates the display of availability on the computer system (§ 6.1.1). This is consequential for the behavior of both the customers (§ 6.1.2) and the officer (§ 6.1.3) and, before both enter in a state of mutual attention in the opening of the encounter (§ 6.1.4), which emerges before the customer reaches the counter and is definitively stabilized when the encounter properly begins with the first request.

6.1.1 Activation of the display of availability

After the departure of the previous client, the officer completes the previous case: the *closing of the encounter* and the *closing of the case* do not coincide and the case might take more time. Moreover, other tasks can be quickly achieved at this point – relative to a pending case, or to an update about the current situation (delays, strikes in neighborhood countries, next departure trains).

The officer turns to the next case when clearing the previous screens and activating a new one, where she is able to click on the button that generates a public sound in the room and the display of the counter's number on a monitor. This click opens a new possible case by publicly displaying the availability of the counter.

The click on the officer's computer results in a double public display, audible and visible: a jingle is heard in the hall, and the number of the counter appears on a monitor along with the number of the customer. There are at least three monitors in the room visible to the persons waiting.

Figure 17

Basel open area with monitors

Figure 17a

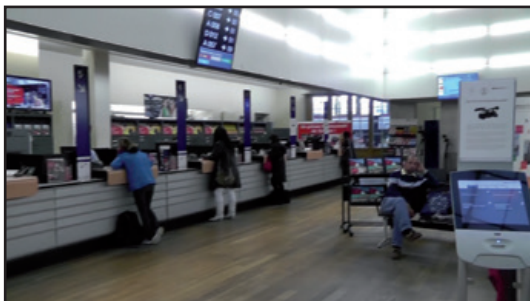
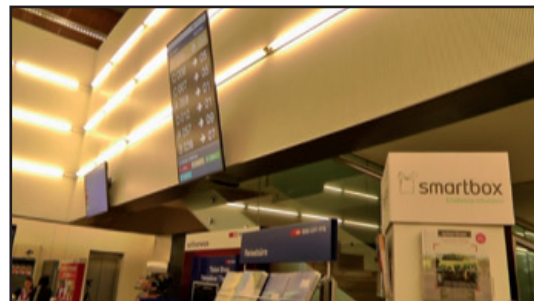


Figure 17b



The jingle (since the audible signal is addressed *before* the visual update of the monitor) is consequential for the organization of the actions of several persons in the hall. We focus first on the customers (§ 6.1.2) and then on the officer (§ 6.1.3), before examining how they join together in the opening of the encounter.

6.1.2 On the side of the customer: Responding to the summons and the call

Upon entering the hall, the customer takes a number from a machine in front of the entrance and organizes his/her waiting time, either by remaining in the hall or by doing something else (the display of the expected waiting time allows for the use of the waiting time for other activities, temporally calibrated with respect to this information – see the next section for an analysis).

When an officer activates the availability display on his/ her computer, this generates a jingle publicly audible in the room. This sound a) works as a summons that is b) *oriented to* by several persons, but is c) *responded to* in a particular way by only one party (constituted by one or several individuals), which treats it not only as a *summons* but also as a *call*.

As such, the jingle is an event that reveals different engagements of the persons co-present in the hall and publicly categorizes them. We first analyze the difference between b) and c) on the basis of one case (§ 6.1.2.1) and then show the methodic organization of the responses (§ 6.1.2.2) on the basis of further instances.

6.1.2.1 Orienting to the jingle vs. responding to the summons

In order to show how different persons in the hall treat the jingle, here we provide a detailed analysis of what happens when the jingle resonates in the hall and of the responsive actions of several people, on the basis of a single case.

We join extract 12 just before the jingle. The extract is represented in the form of a contrastive set of screen shots, before and after the jingle (images 12.1 and 12.3), and of an ELAN transcript, revealing the temporality of these actions.

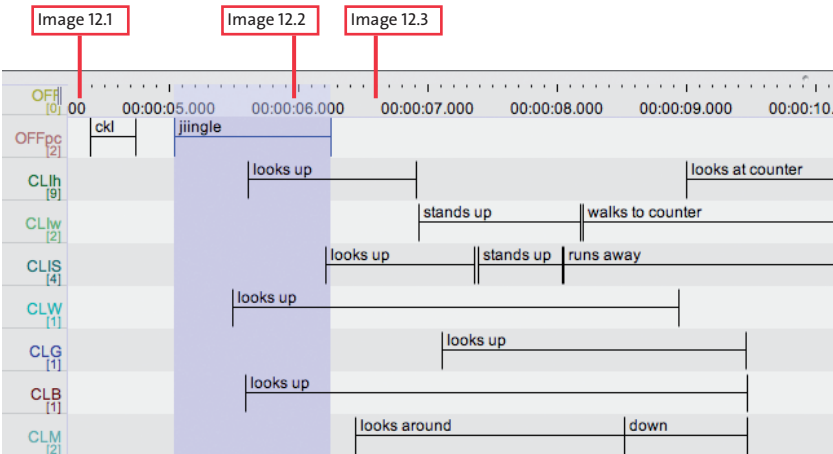
As soon as the jingle is heard, and in a more or less immediate way, different persons change their posture in the hall. They were previously engaged in some individual activity, like reading, using their i-phone, or looking at their belongings (image 12.1). When hearing the sound, some of them raise the head and look at the monitor where the next client's number and the corresponding counter's number are now displayed. Several persons can orient to the summons in that way (image 12.3).

Extract 12
(BS_0954)

Image 12.1



Image 12.2



The summons is oriented to by several persons in the room who were generally looking down at their belongings, but now look up in the direction of the display.

The temporality of their change of bodily orientation is analyzable in detail in the ELAN transcript. The jingle lasts a little more than 1 second. After only 0.5 seconds, the first customer looks up (CLW), and immediately after, the following ones (CLB, CLlh) do the same. Other persons orient a bit later to the summons (CLM, CLG, CLIS).

This temporal distribution deserves some further discussion. There is a clear difference between CLlh, CLW and CLB almost looking up immediately, and CLG looking up later. This might manifest different expectancies. Depending on when the persons have taken a number, they might orient differently towards the plausibility that this particular sound announcement corresponds to their ticket. Some might orient to their number as imminent, others might display that they expect to have to wait for more time. Being ready vs. being slow might display a dynamic orientation to passing time as well as different forms of entitlement.

A specific case is CLM, who is standing near the machine distributing numbers. He orients to the summons but not in a way that displays that he considers that his number is concerned. He does neither directly nor exclusively gaze to the display monitor, but momentarily looks around and soon he returns his gaze to his own business.

So, the temporality and the manner of participants' bodily orientation to the summons displays what kind of customers they are – customers having still to wait, customers having waited already for some time and those expecting to possibly be the next called customer.

Moreover, the orientation to the summons makes publicly observable who are possible customers and who are not. The former orient in one way or the other to the jingle, the latter do not. This accountability is available for the analyst, but first of all for the co-present persons in the hall – allowing them to categorize the persons in the room, recognize fellow travelers, fellow customers, but also people using the hall for other purposes. In this respect, a wider view on the hall shows that there are other persons, who do not turn at all towards the numbers' display (image 12.3).

Image 12.3



The three people in the foreground – who happen to be the researchers orchestrating the video recordings – are engaged in a discussion. They are clearly oriented to each other and they are not paying any attention to the jingle. All other persons visible in this video frame are turning to the display – although in other occasions, there may be other people who do not, that is people who use the hall as a waiting room or as just a place to stay, without “being a next customer”.

Among the customers who treat the jingle as possibly relevant, there are two who not only bodily orient to the display monitor, but who more substantially *respond* to the summons (CLI and CLIS). While the others merely look at the monitor, and then look down again, going back to their former activities, the bodily response of CLI and CLIS consist of looking at the monitor and then standing up, and walking away. Both – recognizable as a mother and her son – leave their current position, of sitting and waiting, in order to walk through the hall. So, among the customers, the orientation to the jingle generates a practical distinction between a) people *not looking* at all at the display, manifesting that they are at that stage not possible next customers, b) people *looking* at the display with a short glance and then returning to their previous activities, manifesting that they are not yet the next customers, c) people *looking* at the display and then *standing up*, manifesting that they are the next customers and achieving the next actions for becoming a customer. The latter not only respond to the *summons* but also to the *call* represented by the display, *instructing* the next client where to go.

6.1.2.2 Other instances of *responses*

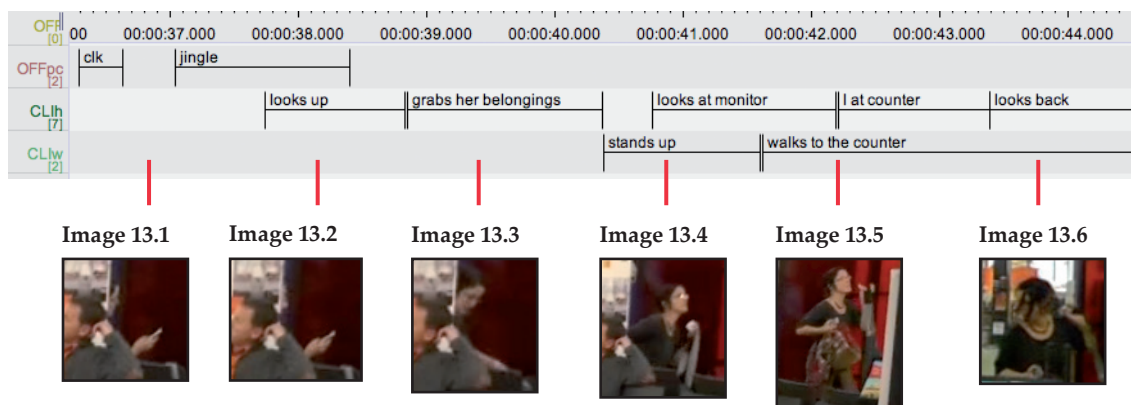
In this section, we move from the single case in the previous section to the study of a small collection, consisting of the embodied responses given by various customers. This reveals a systematic pattern characterizing the change of posture before and after the jingle. In the following analyses we focus on the participants emerging as targeted next clients – rather than on the room as a whole (see above § 6.1.2.1).

First we observe how two individual customers respond to the jingle – then we examine how couples respond to it.

We join the first action as the customer is sitting on a chair and reading:

Extract 13

BS_3811



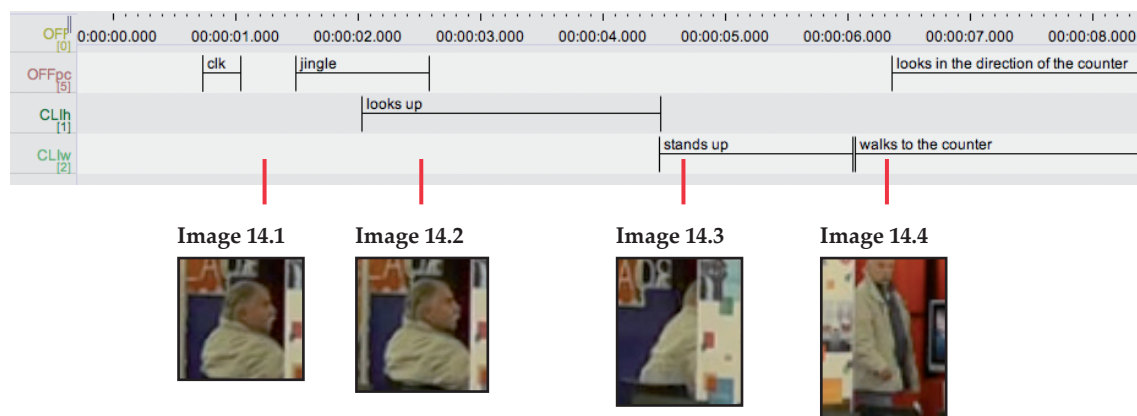
The customer is reading on her tablet (image 13.1). When the jingle is heard, she looks up at the monitor (image 13.2), immediately puts her belongings together (image 13.3), stands up (image 13.4), looking again at the monitor, and begins to walk to the counter (image 13.5). She also gazes back to her place – checking to see that she has not forgotten anything (image 13.6).

Interestingly, the participant glances twice at the monitor: the first time (image 13.2) seems to focus on the identification of the *customer's number*, checking whether she is the concerned client or not; the second time (image 13.5) might be rather related to the identification of the *counter's number*, looking at where she has to go exactly. These two postures orient to, treat and respond to the display in different ways: the first constitutes rather a response to the *summons* and the second a response to the *call*. The latter treats the monitor as instructing the customer's walk, as directing her to a specific counter.

We now turn to another individual customer, whose trajectory is less easy to follow on screen shots but which is well visible on the video:

Extract 14

BS 5639



This customer is not engaged in any activity other than waiting, looking in front of him/ in the void – and this makes the visibility of the transition between waiting (image 14.1) and looking up (image 14.2) difficult in the stills (though it is dynamically visible on the video). Upon activation of the jingle, the customer looks up at the monitor immediately (image 14.2), then stands up (image 14.3) and walks to the counter (image 14.4).

In this case, his gaze toward the monitor is longer than by other customers; however, once on his way, the customer does not look at the display anymore (vs. the previous client). So, the longer glance might be related to both checking his customer's number and consulting the counter's number.

In these two excerpts, the individual customers display the first steps accomplished upon hearing the jingle. The customer suspends the ongoing waiting activity, although

maintaining the same body posture and even freezing the holding of a book or a tablet between their hands in order to look up at the monitor. This way of looking – in which only the gaze/head moves but the rest of the body stays in the same position – orients very much to the looked at / to be discovered display on the monitor as *potentially but not yet actually* relevant for the customer. By maintaining her current body posture, the customer orients to a possible continuation of the waiting activity. This configures the gaze to the monitor as a *check*.

The result of this check is visible in the modification of the body posture, abandoning the waiting activity and preparing to move. The customer stands up, still/again gazing at the monitor – the second gaze is observable as a second consultation of the screen, concerning the target of the walk.

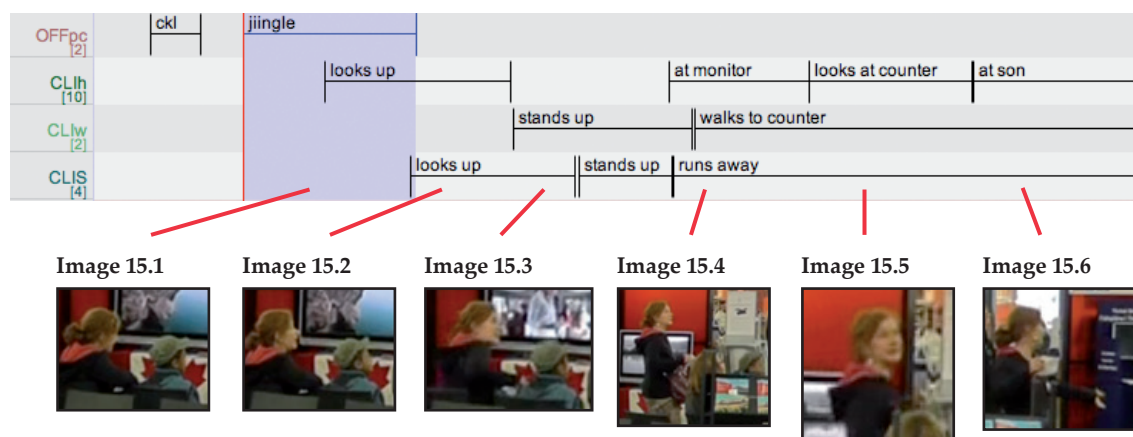
Walking towards the counter is also walking away from the previously occupied seat. This latter movement is made relevant by one customer looking back at the place she was sitting: this is accountable as checking for any forgotten belonging (this happens for a customer who has several bags).

These different steps, even if observed from afar, are socially and publicly accountable and reveal the various practices through which the customer responds to the summons/call.

Turning to couples of customers will allow us to deepen this understanding of the first steps of the customers towards the counter.

Extract 15

BS_0954



The customers – a mother with her son - are busy with some other activity, waiting and looking down (image 15.1). They are seated – which is one possible position for waiting, using the available seats in the hall, possibly orienting to a longer waiting time. Hearing the jingle, they both look up, the boy a bit later than the mother, but in a way that is aligned with her (image 15.2). Next, the mother changes her posture, standing up (image

15.3). This movement is almost abrupt and shows the clear cut transition from looking at the display, discovering that the number corresponds to her number, and consequently she begins to move towards the counter (image 15.4). This demonstrates that the visual check responds to the summons, while the next action – walking to the counter – responds to the instruction represented by the association between the customer's number and the counter's number.

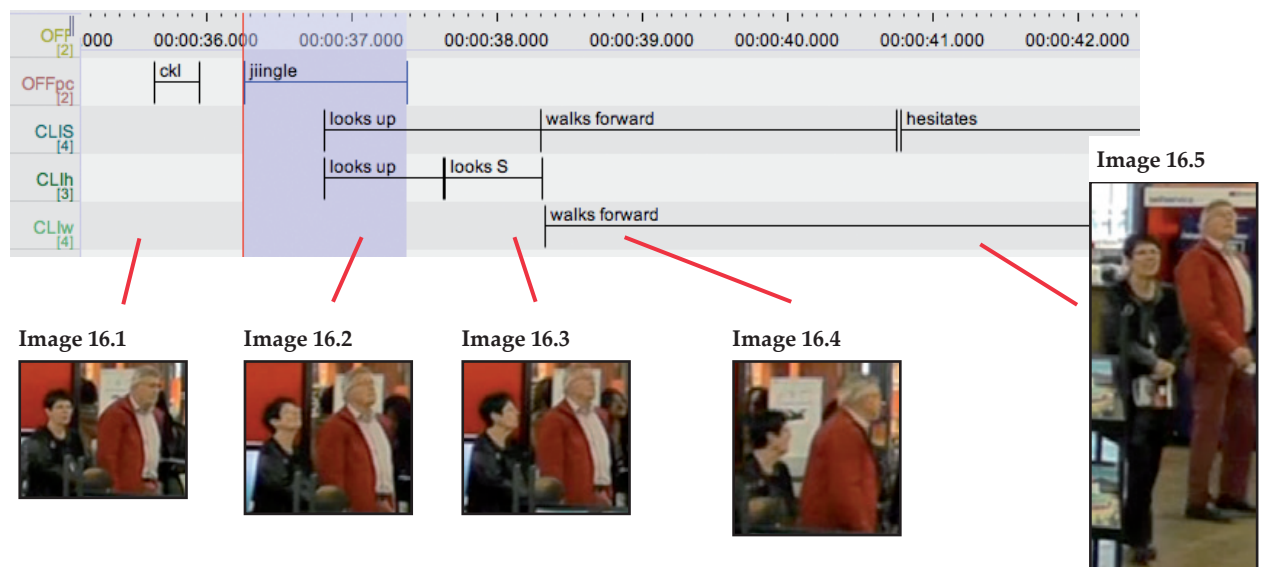
As both the mother and the boy walk to the counter, the boy, preceding her, walks in another direction (towards the left instead of the right). At the beginning of the walk, she was looking at the counter (image 15.5). She then turns to him (image 15.6), orienting to him walking in a divergent direction than hers and stretches her arm out to invite him to walk with her.

So, for a couple of participants, walking together towards the counter – that is, becoming together the next client, as a “with” (Goffman 1971) – supposes a form of coordination of the walk towards a common target. This may generate some extra interactional work.

As we can see from the following extract, similar coordination problems can arise between members of the next couple.

Extract 16

BS_3037



Prior to the jingle, the couple is looking in another direction (image 16.1). They both respond to the jingle by looking up (image 16.2). At this point, as the husband is still looking up, the wife looks at him (image 16.3), before both of them move on. This glance of the wife towards her husband shows how she orients to an issue of coordination, within

the action of walking together towards the counter. They walk forward together (image 16.4), but while her trajectory is directed to the counter, his trajectory is rather hesitant, and stops in the other direction (image 16.5). They get distanced one from the other. So, walking together towards the counter is a practical problem couples have to manage. The issue is to organize the common arrival at the counter as a couple, as a “with”.

So, couples engage in the same practices as individual customers responding to the summons and the call; nonetheless, they may encounter extra interactional tasks in managing the coordination of their walk to the counter, which presents them as a *party* and not merely as single *participants*.

To sum up, these 4 excerpts reveal the set of methodic practices that constitute the response to the jingle. The jingle is a summons for different waiting customers in the hall, who *orient* to it. But the summons is *responded to* by only the customers who recognize the number displayed on the monitor. The consequentiality of checking the monitor distinguishes between the customers who still have to wait and the customers who are currently selected. For the latter, the jingle becomes now not only a *summons* but a *call*, inviting or urging to go to the corresponding counter.

Let’s now follow the walk to the counter, before to turn to the activity of the officer.

6.1.2.3 Walking to the counter

This section briefly comments on the walk of the customer to the counter, once s/he has stood up.

The walk of individual customers is quite straightforward:

Extract 17

BS_5634

	00:06.000	00:00:07.000	00:00:08.000	00:00:09.000	00:00:10.000	00:00:11.000	00:00:12.000	00:00:13.000
FFpd [2]								
CLlh [5]		looks in the direction of the counter	down	looks in front of him				
CLlw		walks to the counter						

Extract 18

BS_3811

	00:00:42.000	00:00:43.000	00:00:44.000	00:00:45.000	00:00:46.000	00:00:47.000
OFFpc [2]						
CLlh [8]	or	looks at counter	looks back	looks in front of her		
CLlw [2]		walks to the counter				

The customers' walk is characterized by the fact that they are not only bodily oriented towards the counter, but also gaze in the direction of the counter and, as they move parallel to other counters, look ahead. Thus, their body is fully oriented towards the counter: the target of their walk.

Moreover, the walk is pretty homogeneous and continuous; no hitches characterize it. The customer in extract 18 (3811) walks faster than the one in excerpt 17 (5634). The latter case shows how customers might display an orientation to some temporal pressure relevant for them and the officer.

If we turn to the way couples walk towards the counter, we notice again that they have to manage an extra constraint: the mutual coordination of their walk and their joint approach and arrival to the counter. This is observable in different ways in the two cases considered: by the mother and her child and by the husband and wife.

Extract 19

BS_0954

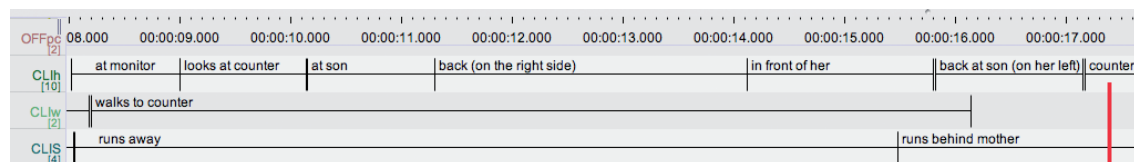


Image 19.1a



Image 19.1b

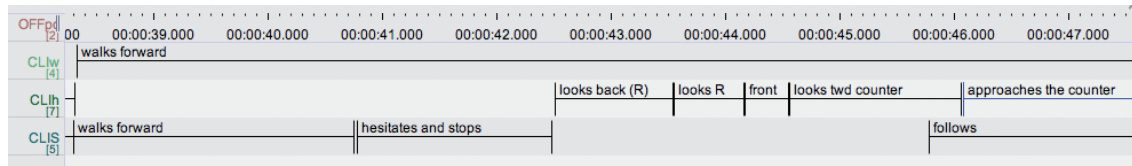


The walk to the counter begins with the mother shepherding the son (at the beginning, she touches him and orients his body, cf. Cekaite 2010), and his running ahead. However, his trajectory continues not towards the counter but in the opposite direction – so that their trajectories diverge. While walking towards the counter, the mother turns back, to her right first and then to her left. Her trajectory displays that she manages both the progression to the counter and her monitoring and guiding of her son's trajectory.

In a different manner, the coordination of the walk between the husband and wife present similar issues.

Extract 20

BS_3037



The couple begins to walk forward at the same time. However, while the wife walks straight to the counter, the husband walks in another direction, hesitating and stopping. Their path diverges. At this point, he is not in the camera frame anymore. His wife orients to his disaligned trajectory, turning slightly back and looking around, before redirecting her gaze back towards the counter. After a short lapse, the husband is visibly following his wife, who is almost arriving at the counter. As we will see later on, this impacts the organization of the greetings, just before they both reach the counter.

So, in both of these cases featuring a couple, some problems of coordination are observable. One participant is leading the walk, the other one is moving in another direction, and this occasions his delay, as well as some monitoring by the former. This shows that participants might struggle to preserve both the progressivity of their walk and the vehicular unit – the “with” – they constitute with their fellow customer. This has further consequences for the organization of the opening, as we will see below (§ 6.1.4).

6.1.3 On the side of the officer: waiting for the next client

Just after the activation of the jingle on the computer, the officer adopts a waiting posture that presents some features – which will not be demonstrated on the basis of the ELAN transcripts here, but just summarized for the sake of brevity.

There is obviously a lapse between the display of availability and the arrival of the responding participant(s) within a zone where the first mutual gaze is established between the officer and the customer.

This lapse is characterized by specific postures and actions of the officer, observable as ‘waiting’ and as ‘not yet in interaction with the customer’ – hence in part as private/individual and in part as preparation for the encounter.

Some of the postures and actions are clearly disengaged from the imminent encounter: the officer looks down, inspects her workplace, grasps and moves some artifacts (pens, papers, etc.). The officer might also adopt some facial expressions that are self-oriented, for instance, pursing, biting, licking his/her lips, or chewing as well as self-touch gestures.

Some of the postures are clearly preparatory for the next encounter: the officer changes bodily position, relaxes, stretches and repositions on her chair, finally adopting a straight, a bit rigid, standing, 'professional' posture.

The succession of these postures is clearly oriented to the time it possibly takes the customer to check the monitor and to begin to move towards the counter. At the beginning of the lapse, the officer is relaxed and disengaged from the next encounter. As time passes, the officer adopts an official professional posture, orienting to the imminent arrival of the client in the zone of mutual gaze.

6.1.4 The establishment of mutual gaze and the opening of the encounter

The communication between officer and customer begins *in absentia* and at distance. The beginning of the transaction is managed, supported and mediated by technologies: the customer taking a ticket and therefore being registered by the system, the officer activating the sound and visual displays of availability for the next number, the customer monitoring the screen where the call finally appears. These activities are sequentially organized within a form of interactivity which nonetheless is neither personal (only numbers are automatically distributed), nor face-to-face.

Moreover, during the lapse between the officer's announcement and the embodied walking response of the customer, both parties organize their conduct in a way that is solitary/individual (except the couples) and that does not yet engage in the interaction (although being publicly accountable and observable by bystanders).

Therefore, an interesting issue is when the face-to-face interaction between the officer and the customer(s) really begins – that is, how is the opening organized. The encounter concerns participants who do not know each other. There are many counters in the hall and there are many persons and potential clients, but at some point it is very evident for both parties that they are the persons concerned by the projected opening of that particular interaction. This evidence is categorically based – relying on the identification of not only persons but also actions in a category bound way. The officer expects the imminent arrival of a customer, and that particular customer is recognizable first of all by the trajectory of the walk towards that particular counter.

The first exchange of glances is the very first moment in which both parties meet and a first mutual contact is established.

As above, we begin this analysis with single parties, since the couples present a series of interesting complementary problems to solve in order to organize the joint arrival at the counter.

Several analytical difficulties are raised by this analysis. Although the cameras allow us to see the gaze/the head orientation of the participants – since gaze is often visible thanks to (changes of the) orientation of their heads –, it is often difficult to say with certitude what is gazed at. Consequently, it is difficult to say when there is mutual

gaze between the participants. In the transcript, we have adopted different formulations (such as ‘looks at the direction of the counter’, ‘looks in front’, ‘looks at the officer’) and refrained from attributing a gaze to the other person unless this seems quite uncontroversial on the basis of the video. These formulations also consider the difference between a gaze from afar (at the direction of the counter) and a closer gaze (at the officer), as well as direction of the gaze and direction of the walk/the body orientation (gazing in front). Moreover, mutual (eye) contact can be warranted on the basis of other conducts, such as a smile – which, however, can be initiated unilaterally and/or before the actual mutual gaze.

Extract 21

BS_3811

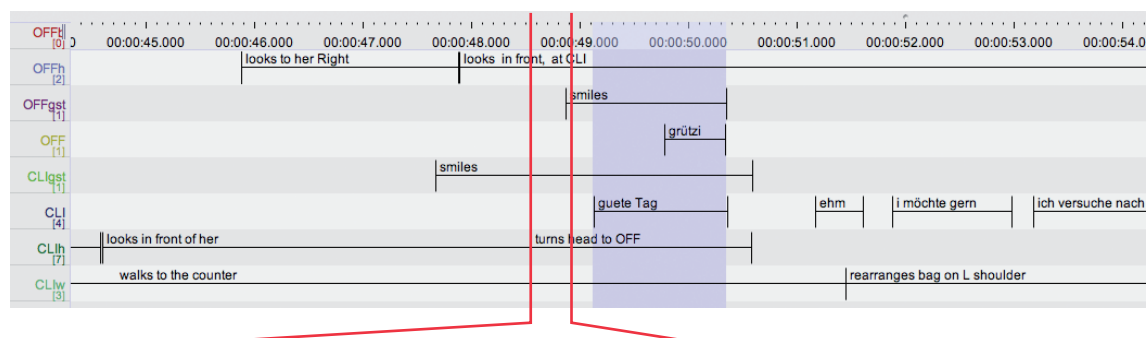


Image 21.1a

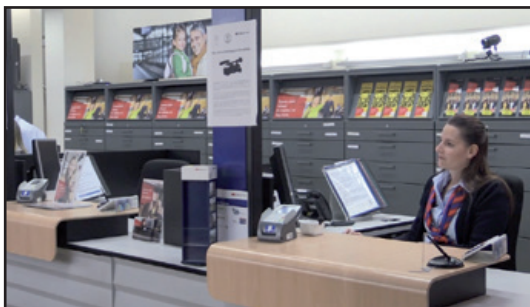


Image 21.2a

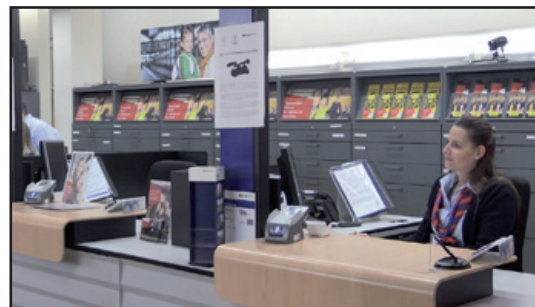


Image 21.1b



Image 21.2b



Image 21.1c



Image 21.2c



The customer approaches the counter, looking straight ahead. While approaching, she smiles. This smile anticipates the mutual gaze rather than co-occurring with it. Temporally and sequentially, the officer's smile is responsive to the customer's smile.

Just prior to this mutual smile, the officer, who was monitoring the approach of the customer on her right, makes a brusque movement with her head, with a staggered gaze. This movement is related to the fact that the counters are separated by pillars and that the customer, coming from the right, is just hidden by the pillar at that point, being visible again on the left immediately after. The pillar constitutes a constraint for the continuity of gaze movements. The officer orients to this architectural feature by abruptly reorienting her head, in such a way that she stares at the customer when the latter is visible again after the pillar.

The customer approaches while looking in front of her. Slightly after the officer's staggered gaze movement, she turns her head towards the officer. At this point, a mutual gaze is possibly established (image 21.1) – alternatively it is possibly established when the officer begins to smile (image 21.2).

The greetings begin after the mutual gaze is established, and before the customer is fully positioned in front of the counter in a stabile body position. They are initiated by the customer, and returned by the officer in overlap.

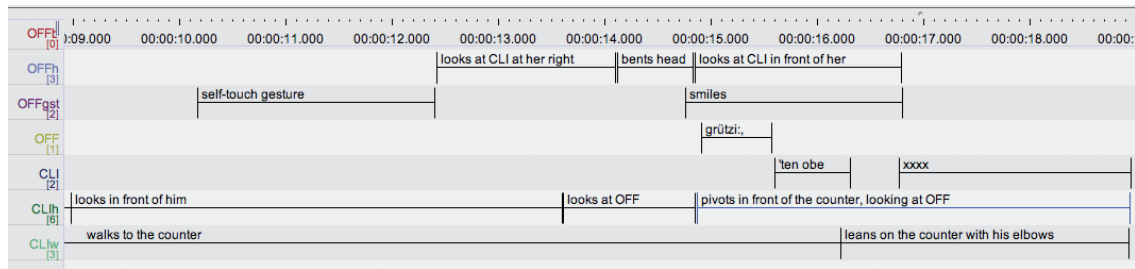
When the customer has reached a position in front of the counter, she initiates her request (with “ehm”) while rearranging her bag on her shoulder, which readjusts and further destabilizes her body position.

In this excerpt, the customer initiates an early opening (initiation of the first smile and of the greetings). The officer is rather responsive.

In other cases, the officer may initiate the opening, as in the following one:

Extract 22

BS_5634



As the customer approaches the counter, he is looking in front of himself and the officer is busy with a self-touch gesture on her face. As she withdraws her hand from her face, she looks at the customer coming on her right and monitors his arrival. The customer looks at her about one second later. At this point, the officer's gaze is discontinued by a change in her head's position, bending it a little bit to the left. This movement adjusts to the pillar covering the sight of the customer. After the customer has passed the pillar, she continues to gaze at him in front of her. So, mutual gaze is established when she bends her head. She smiles and greets the customer as soon as mutual gaze is secured. The customer responds with a greeting uttered in the move, as he is still approaching the counter. He then leans over the counter on his elbows, in a stabilized position. At this point, he produces his request.

In sum, while in the first case the mutual engagement is rather initiated by the customer, in the second case it is initiated by the officer.

Mutual gaze may be established at different moments, earlier or later, but has to adjust to the local contingencies – such as the ecology of the counter (for instance, the pillar). The pillar might even become a resource for the organization of mutual gaze, used as a frame allowing the participants to discriminate between monitoring and establishing mutual gaze, between moments within the walking trajectory which are *not yet* vs. *already* in a zone of possible mutual gaze.

Moreover, mutual gaze is immediately followed by a smile, initiated by the customer in the first case, by the officer in the last one. While greetings are exchanged still in the move, the request tends to be uttered once the customer is positioned in front of the counter.

These methodic practices and the contingencies affecting them are observable for individual as well as groups. Nonetheless, in the latter case, the organization of the coordinated arrival of both customers to the counter further impacts the sequentiality and temporality of the establishment of mutual gaze and the greetings.

Extract 23
BS_0954

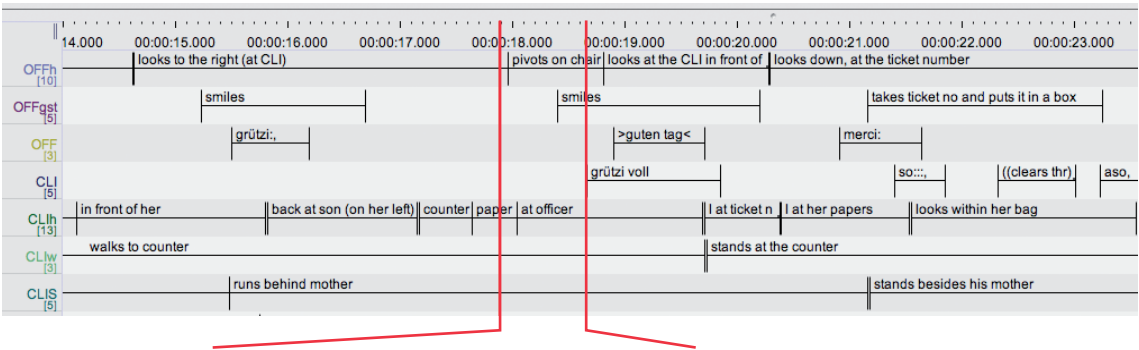


Image 23.1a



Image 23.2a



Image 23.1b



Image 23.2b



Image 23.1c



Image 23.2c



The mother walks to the counter, followed by her son. The officer monitors her, looking to the right where she is coming from.

The officer smiles pretty early and utters an early greeting. But, instead of responding, the mother looks back at her son: this is a way of delaying the relevance of the opening until they both have reached the counter.

When the customer arrives at the pillar, both participants orient to this contingent feature. The officer turns her head and smiles, so that when the customer is again visible (image 23.2) she is welcomed with a frontal glance, a smile and a new greeting. The customer, who was looking at the counter, looks down at a sheet of paper (image 23.1) – exploiting her momentarily invisibility to have a glance at her notes. As soon as she passes the pillar, she initiates the greeting – in overlap with the officer's greetings.

As soon as the greeting sequence is completed, the customer turns to business. She handles the ticket number – taken by the officer who thanks them and puts it in a small box on her right – and initiates her request by looking again at her notes, as well as searching in her bag while initiating verbally the reason for coming with “so:::”.

In this case, the mother orients to the late arrival of the son by not responding to the first greeting, and she delays the opening as contingent upon the arrival of her son at the counter. This is oriented to by the officer too, which accounts for the production a new pair of greetings later. Moreover, this delay is also exploited by the mother by turning back to her notes at a particular moment, when she passes the pillar.

These delays characterize the arrival of the other couple too:

Extract 24

BS_3037

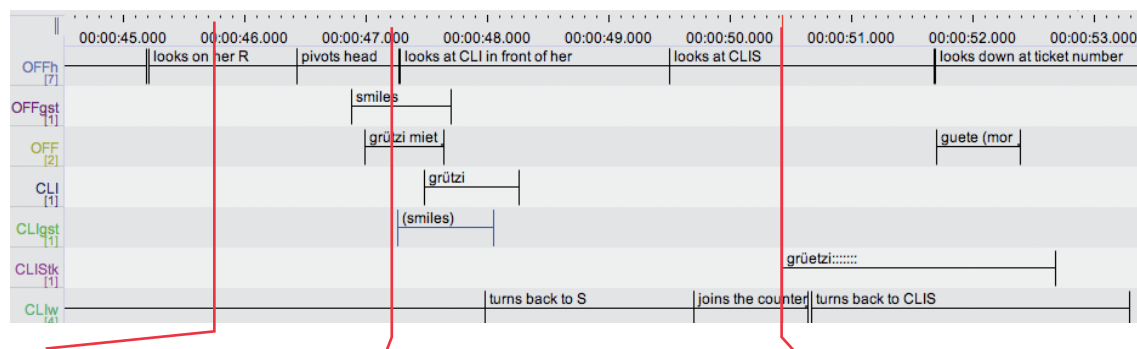


Image 24.1a



Image 24.2a

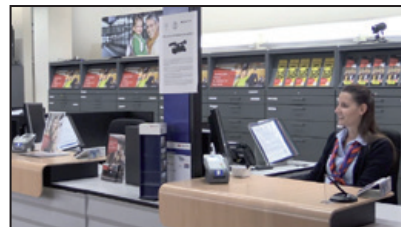


Image 24.3a



Image 24.1b



Image 24.2b

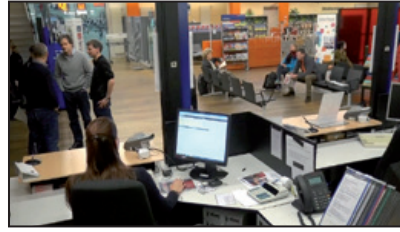


Image 24.3b

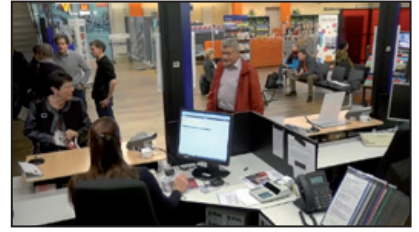


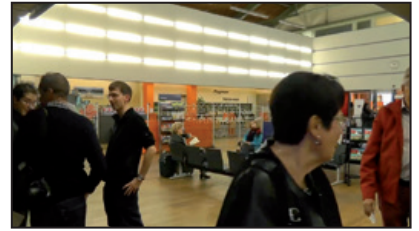
Image 24.1c



Image 24.2c



Image 24.3c



The woman is the first to walk to the counter. The man follows at some distance. Consequently, the officer looking to her right monitors first the approach of the woman (image 24.1). When she passes the pillar, the officer pivots her head, now looking straight ahead at the woman. At this moment she smiles and greets them. The form selected for the greeting “grützi mietenand” refers to both of the customers, though only the woman is actually standing in front of her. This displays the fact that the officer has seen and monitored the couple. The greeting is responded with a “grützi” in return, by the woman slightly smiling (image 24.2).

But at this point, the woman turns back to her partner who is still walking to the counter (image 24.3). The officer adjusts to this management of the delay, by also monitoring his arrival at the counter. This suspends the opening and refocuses the attention from the woman to the man.

The husband orients to his late arrival by producing a greeting well before he reaches the counter. The form of the greeting (“grüetzi:::”) is durably lengthened. This accommodates the time of his approach, and is expanded almost until he reaches the counter. This greeting occasions a second greeting in return by the officer.

The man also approaches the counter holding the ticket number and depositing it ostensibly on the table, and then picked up by the officer. This extended gesture has the same stretched qualities as the greeting; moreover, it constitutes the man as the one who has the proof of the legitimacy of the customers being served at that moment. The husband is also the one who will utter the request.

Thus, the arrival of couples to the counter imposes extra interactional constraints on the opening of the encounter. The customers have to manage their coordinated arrival as well as possible late arrivals of one of them. The first manages both the incipient encounter with the officer and organizes the delay of the progressivity of the opening,

waiting for the second (interestingly this happens not only for the wife waiting for the husband, who will then be in charge of the request, but also for the mother waiting for her son). For the officer, how to treat collective customers also poses a series of practical problems. As a matter of fact, the officer both addresses the first customer arriving at the counter, although at the same time displaying an orientation to the party, and even to the late second customer. This is observable both in the officer's gaze and in the formats chosen for the greetings. This globally impacts the sequence organization of the opening, as visible in the greeting sequence.

In sum, the systematic study of four cases of openings at the open counter operating with a computerized system for the management of queuing demonstrates the methodic practices through which customers monitor the screen, respond to the summons, walk to the counter, officers wait for them and both open a new interactional encounter. The identification of the sequentially ordered set of practices characterizing this type of opening shows the impact both of the queuing management system and of the “open” design of the counter on the fine-tuned organization of these practices.

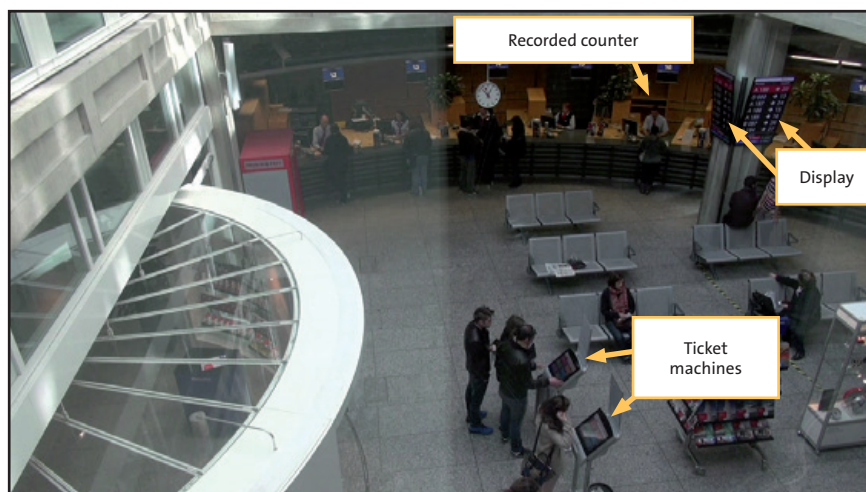
6.2 In search of the next absent client (Zurich)

The previous analyses (§ 6.1) have demonstrated the smooth operation of the queuing computerized management. We now turn to the Zurich open counter area operating with the same system in order to show how the computerized allocation system may also result in perturbations and hitches. One recurrent cause of problems is the delayed response of customers, who might take a more or less extended time to approach to the counter. Our last analyses deal with cases of absence – showing how customers as well as officers orient to absence and manage it.

The Zurich open area setting is fully visible from the following vertical perspective on the service area (Figure 18).

Figure 18

Open service area at Zurich main station



In the next extract, we will track a concrete encounter from the moment in which the customer obtains a ticket from the machine. The foregoing encounter has just finished and the previous client has just left the counter. The following stills show the situation as the agent presses the “next” button on her screen, producing an acoustic signal (jingle) and a visible signal on the screen (next customer’s number is displayed and related to counter 16):

Extract 25 / part 25.1

ZH_Open_Sch16_Pers1_Gespr32 — Producing the next number

Image 25.1a (12:10:14)



Image 25.1b

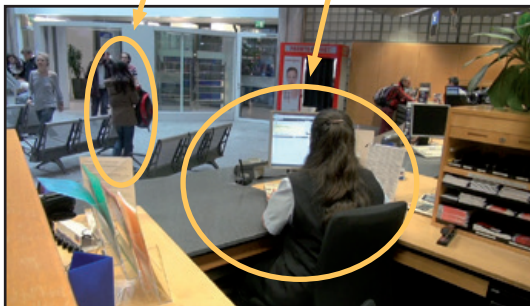
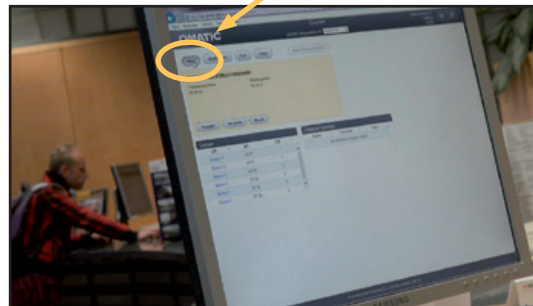


Image 25.1c



In this case, nobody responds to the summons: nobody displays themselves as an imminent client. Consequently, the officer looks for candidates for the next client.

Extract 25 / part 25.2

The waiting agent (looking for potential next clients)

Image 25.2 (12:14:15)



Image 25.3 (12:16:12)



Image 25.4 (12:18:05)



Image 25.5 (12:23:10)



Image 25.6 (12:29:03)



Image 25.7 (12:34:01)



None of the persons visible in the waiting area seems to respond to the new displays of availability for counter 16, so the officer reproduces the signal some 20 seconds later (see image 25.7). Again there is no publicly visible response from anybody relevantly expected to respond (although there is one potential next client who orients to and gazes at the counter, circled on images 25.8a and 25.8b):

Extract 25 / part 25.3

Potential non relevant clients orient to the still ongoing search of the next

Image 25.8a (12:34:01)



Image 25.8b



Potential next client

The potential client proves to be the wrong candidate. He does not prepare to approach the counter, and instead turns back to one of the seats. It takes another 20 seconds until it becomes clear *for the officer* that the imminent client is finally appearing and approaching the counter.

Extract 25 / part 25.4

Becoming the imminent client

Image 25.9a (12:50:15)

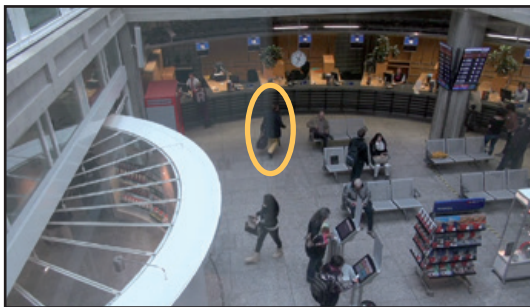


Image 25.9b



Image 25.9c



A few seconds later, the officer visibly prepares for the incoming customer by looking up at him and starting to smile. The customer himself is already preparing the presentation of the ticket.

Extract 25 / part 25.5

The customer approaches the counter, holding a ticket

Image 25.10a (12:53:13)



Image 25.10b



Image 25.11a (12:54:11)



Image 25.11b



During his approach, the greeting (“grüetzi wohl” – “hello”) is uttered, immediately followed by the customer’s comment to his being a bit late (“etz han ich das ERscht grad gseh” – “now I’ve just seen that”). The opening is completed already before the customer has situated himself at the counter. This seems to hold for most of our opening sequences; they start slightly before the customer has reached his/her final position at the counter and are already closed when he has arrived at the counter. But what differs from our previous cases, are the precursory events that take place before the opening starts. When the late comer and recently identified customer emerges as the *next* client, he is already the *imminent* client, i. e. the one whose turn it is.

Interesting enough, it turns out that the customer had already been on the scene for a long time. He had been taking photos in a photo booth in the waiting area. That means, he had inferred from the numbered ticket delivered by the ticket machine that he had enough time for another activity. He used this time to enter the booth and take photos (which by the way he needed for the renewal of his SBB reduction card, as we know from the encounter).

Extract 26 / part 26.1

Customer of extract 25 in the service area

Image 26.1 (10:06:18)

Customer takes his ticket from the ticket machine

**Image 26.2 (10:15:07)**

Customer enters the photo booth

**Image 26.3 (10:16:07)**

Customer disappears



Image 26.4 (12:22:10)

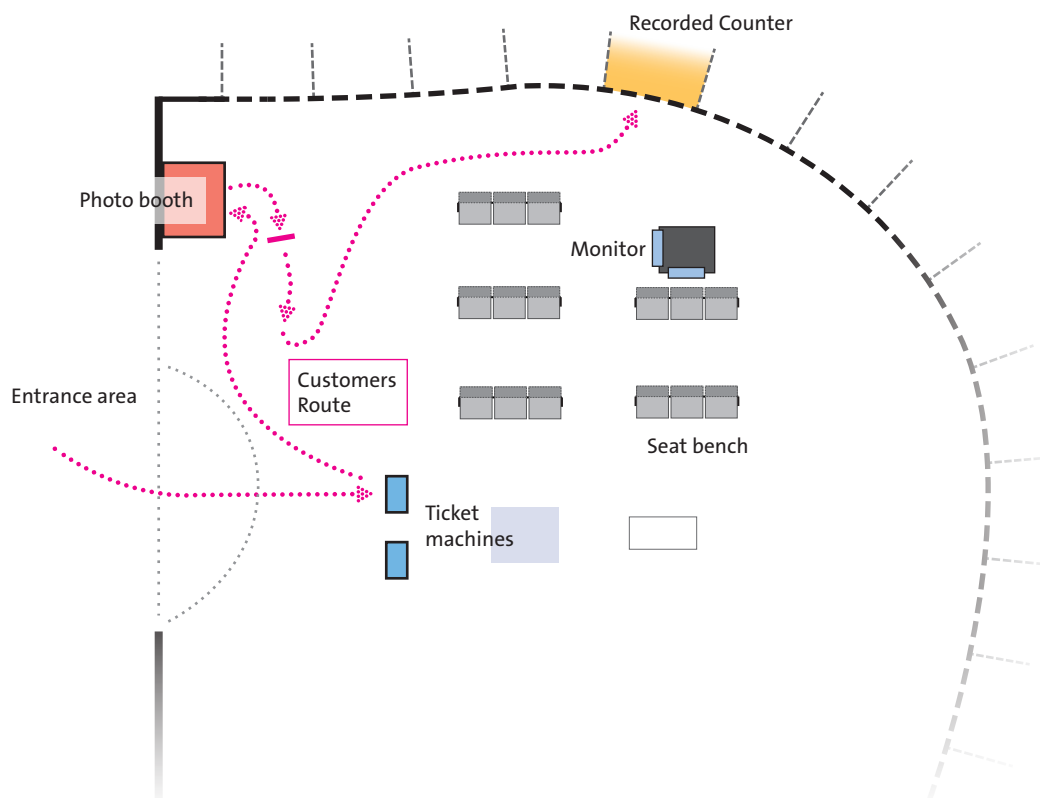
Customer reappears



Having left the booth and having taken the photos, the customer looks at the monitor, notices that it is already his turn and starts moving to the counter (see extract 25). His route across the ticket area can be sketched as follows:

Figure 19

The customer's route in the service area



When the officer presses the “next” button for the first time (see above image 25.1), the person we know will be the next client is still in the booth.

Extract 26 / part 26.2

Customer in the booth

Image 26.5 (12:10:14)

The hidden client



Image 26.5 nicely illustrates both that the ticketing systems allows for waiting clients to be busy with other activities (such as taking photos) and how this generates practical problems for the officer. They might be in fact invisible for the officer, orienting to their ‘absence’. Even when the person is leaving the booth, he is still not visible as the next client.

Extract 26 / part 26.2

Customer leaving the photo booth

Image 26.6 (12:21:03)

Knowing the course of events from the video recordings, we know that the person now leaving the booth is going to be the next client. But this retrospective knowledge is of course irrelevant for what prospectively happens at that very moment. Although physically re-appearing, the person remains invisible *as* next client. This invisibility lasts for quite a while, until the customer himself starts to realize that it is already his turn.

Extract 26 / part 26.3

Customer waits for the photos

Image 26.7 (12:23:13)



Image 26.8 (12:27:18)



Image 26.9 (12:31:11)

Customer takes photos



Image 26.10 (12:34:08)

Customer looks at photos



Image 26.11 (12:38:23)

Customer starts monitoring the display



Image 26.12 (12:42:15)

Customer checks his ticket number



Image 26.13a (12:47:08)

Customer moves sideways and checks the display

**Image 26.13b****Image 26.14a (12:49:03)**

Customer has turned towards the counter

**Image 26.14b**

So, it takes some time for the person who left the photo booth to gradually become accountable as the next and imminent client, by turning to the direction of the counter after having demonstrably orientated towards the computerized system (checking his number, watching the display).

We have tracked this gradual transformation in a fine-grained way in order to illustrate that the customer becomes the next client in the very moment in which he starts realizing that it is his turn now and in which the officer recognizes him as displaying that and as lately responding to his summons.

7 Conclusion: Becoming the current client across various architectural settings

This paper has extensively described different types of openings of service encounters at Swiss railway stations, by relating them to a diversity of local fleeting and durable contingencies. More specifically, we have highlighted the following characteristics of these openings:

- *The incremental and emergent organization of the openings* highlights their organization in different phases, such as preparation, pre-opening, and opening, and leads to the

beginning of the encounter, with the reason of the visit. These steps involve recurrent activities both of the customer and the officer. Some activities are unilaterally individual, whereas some are intersubjective and belong to the same joint project of the participants. Some activities are clearly preparatory. They precede the openings (like searching for the pre-print train time schedule in the bag for the customer, reordering the desk and the computer screen for the officer), and do not involve any direct interaction between customer and officer, being rather individual and solitary – although their communication might be mediated by technology (the queuing management system).

- The *spatial-material disposition* of the station, the waiting area and the row of counters plays a significant role in the sequential formatting of the openings. More generally, this casts some light about the constraints (and potentialities) of space and architecture on service interactions at the counter. We have highlighted the relevance of architectural design for the opening of the encounter – pointing not only at the difference between the windowpane vs. the open counter, but also the architectural details facilitating or hindering visual access between the participants.
- The *material and technological equipment* of the counters and the waiting hall have a series of consequences on the emergent pre-opening and opening. We have highlighted the contrast between physical queuing vs. abstract queuing through a computerized system. The former presents clear visual affordances and allows for an early monitoring and mutual gaze between customers and officers (although this depends on the architecture of the room); the latter is controlled by the officer at distance (through his/her computer) and oriented to, monitored, and aligned with by the customers, also at distance. This generates a course of action in which both *communicate* in abstract virtual terms, through the mediation of the computer system before they *interact* in face-to-face.
- *The importance of spatiality* is related to the crucial role of *mobility* for the organization of openings. The customer approaches the counter and the details of his/her mobile trajectory matter for the organization of the first steps of the encounter. In turn, this trajectory is constrained by the spatial configuration of the setting.
- Both the routine practices and the mobility characterizing openings massively orient to locally made relevant *categories* characterizing the trajectory of the customers across the broader activity of entering the station and buying a train ticket, but also across more local practices constituting the openings. Our analyses have repeatedly pointed out the progressive establishment of categories such as *possible client*, *waiting client*, *next client*, *imminent client*, and *current client*. These categories are related not only to category-bound activities but also to category-bound positions within a mobile trajectory – defined in terms of unilateral approach, first exchange of glances, mutual orientation, projection of the imminent pre-opening and opening.

These observations contribute both to a better understanding of how *openings* are organized – a classical topic within CA, but which is still being relatively neglected from a multimodal perspective – and of how *service encounters* are designed as specific institutional events, particularly in the way their openings are locally shaped. Our analyses have shown how a fine-grained multimodal analysis contributes to the understanding of the multiple contingencies and demands impinging on the emergent and stepwise format of the encounter. They have also experimented different forms of multimodal transcription and visual representation of the data – which lead both to in-depth single case analyses and to systematic analyses of collections.

These observations also pave the way for diverse forms of comparisons. The corpus presents data from different cultural regions, and in which different languages are spoken. This invites further research comparing ways of doing in different places as well as ways of formatting actions in different languages (Sidnell & Enfield 2012; Sidnell 2009; Mondada in press c). In our analyses, we have rather exploited another form of comparison, holding between different types of material and spatial configurations. For instance, the comparison between various settings has shown that the differences between open counters cannot be reduced to the presence or absence of actual queuing, although this represents typical contrastive cases. Detailed analyses have shown that when customers queue in an architectural setting that does not provide the possibility to visually monitor the open counter (its availability/not availability), similar problems as with the window-pane emerge (with either the customer or the official being puzzled about who is next). This allowed us to draw an important distinction among counters with physical queuing, between different degrees of mutual visibility and accessibility.

Figure 20
Counters with physical queuing: Differences in visibility and signaling

		Visibility between customer and agent	
		With visible access	Without visible access
Technical display of availability	With acoustic and/or visual signals		Zurich 1
	Without any signal	Geneva 1	Basel 1; Lugano

These differences manifest themselves in the organization of social interaction in general and more particularly in the organization of openings. The different spatial configurations studied also differently distribute the participants within the global space of the

hall where the counters are located. We pointed out some of the features characterizing these global and local positions and trajectories, and their consequences in particular for the relevant characterization of the client's trajectory.

The extensive analyses of this paper show the crucial importance of multimodal as well as material-spatial details for the organization of openings in particular and social interaction in general. They highlight the interest of the data collected within the "Am Schalter – au guichet – allo sportello" project and their potentialities for further research.

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